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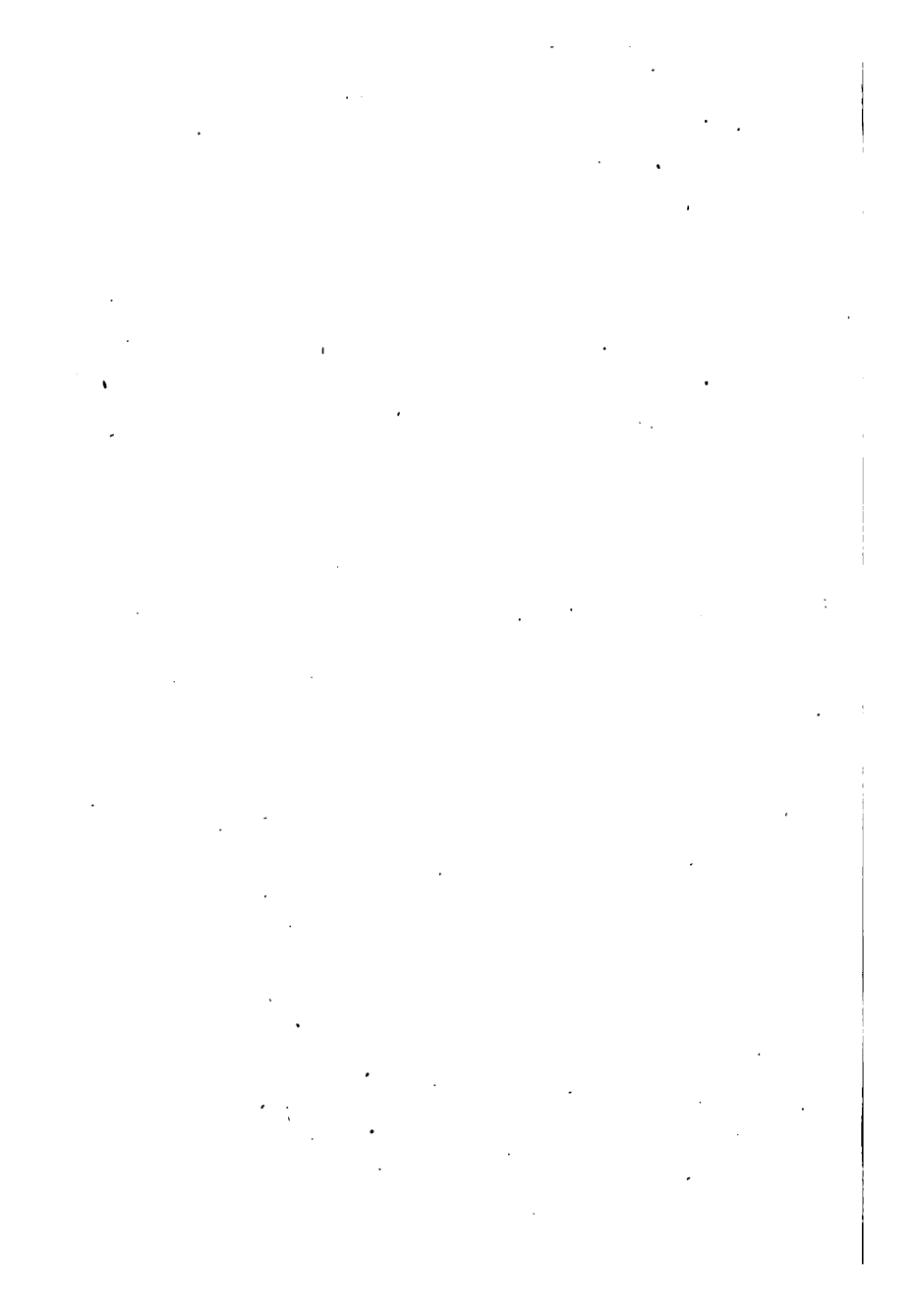


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**CURIOUS AND WONDERFUL  
TALES.**



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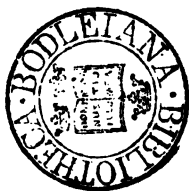
# IS IT TRUE?

*TALES*

*CURIOUS & WONDERFUL*

COLLECTED BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN.'



LONDON:

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## PREFACE.



‘IS IT TRUE?’—a question children are sure to ask about any curious or wonderful story; and they may well ask it of some of these tales.

I can only answer, that many people must have believed them to be true, since each is founded on a tradition, current in the place where it is supposed to have happened. Probably at the root of all lies a grain of truth, that in course of years has grown up and blossomed into these extraordinary fictions, which of course nobody can be expected to believe. But they are generally amusing, and sometimes pathetic. Besides, there is a clear thread of right and wrong running



through them, as it does through most legends which deal with the supernatural world. There (as here, soon or late) virtue is always rewarded and vice punished.

The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small ;  
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds  
He all.

It is this spirit which consecrates the true untruth, the wise foolishness, of fairy tales, and indeed of all imaginative literature.

Nor, I think, will any sensible child mistake the vast difference between imagination and falsehood: between the weaving of a mere romance ('all pretence, all out of my own head, mamma,' as a little girl sometimes says, who tells me the most astonishing stories, but who never told an untruth in her life), and that deliberate inventing or falsifying of facts which we stigmatise and abhor as *lying*.

Therefore, I do not think any child will be the worse for reading these tales. They have been collected out of the folk-lore of various countries,



+ and written, at my suggestion, by various hands. I have written none myself, but I have revised the whole; and with as much pleasure as if I were again a child, and believed in fairies as earnestly as I once did, and as the little person before named does now. But it is only with her imagination: not, to use her own phrase, 'really and truly.' She quite understands the difference; and never expects to meet a fairy in every-day life; though I dare say she would like it very much—and so would many of my readers—and so should I.

THE EDITOR.







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*THE STORY OF ELIDURE.*

ONG, long ago, on a sunny seat beneath a grey monastery wall, an old monk in the summer days used to sit, hour after hour, leaning upon his staff, and gazing before him with dim dreamy eyes that seemed always to be looking far away beyond the hills for something he could never find. The sunshine filled the little green Welsh valley round him ; the village children playing outside the monastery walls hushed their voices sometimes, and stole near with grave and curious faces to look at him through the iron gate ; but Elidure scarcely noticed them. An old, old man, he sat alone, dreaming over the story of his youth. For a strange and marvellous thing had happened to him then ;



and, on the rare occasions when he could be persuaded to speak about it, this was the tale he told.

Many years before, when he was a boy, learning had not been a pleasant thing to him. Possibly because almost from the time when he had first come into the world his father had resolved to make a learned man of him, and as soon as he was old enough to learn his letters had got some of the monks, in this same monastery where he now lived, to train him and tutor him, and teach him Latin and Greek. The poor little lad, who was always wanting to be out playing in the fields, had been set to pore over his books morning, noon, and night, till he hated the work, and got so many thrashings for doing it badly, that at last he resolved he would not bear it any longer, but made up his mind to run away, and seek his own fortune in the world.

One day, accordingly, instead of going as usual to the monastery, when he had set out from home with his little bundle of books upon his back, he turned his face exactly the other way, and, going as fast as he could for a few miles, he came to a cave hollowed out of a rock by



the bank of a river, and having first sunk his bag of books in the water—for he hated them so that it quite comforted him to get rid of them in that way—he crept into this hollow place, resolving to hide himself in it till his father and mother should give him up for lost. He was only twelve years old, so that naturally he was not as yet very wise. I daresay he thought that he could live for a good while upon blackberries, and probably he looked forward to being able to lead a very happy life presently, rambling about upon the hills, with nobody to speak crossly to him, or whip him, or send him to his crabbed Latin books.

However, before much more than a very few hours had passed, he began to find that blackberries, even when you can have as many of them as you want, are very unsubstantial food, and that it is rather a dull thing for a little lad to have nobody to talk to, and nobody to say a word to him. Indeed, to tell the truth, he found it very cheerless to be hungry and solitary ; nor did he like it a bit the better when night came. Then, having, of course, no bed-clothes, he got so cold that he was hardly able to go to sleep. Yet he had some spirit ; and so,



since he *had* run away, he resolved, however disagreeable it was, that he would not go home again, but would make the best of it. 'In a day or two they will have given up looking for me,' he thought to himself, 'and then I shall be able to steal away, and I daresay I shall soon find something else to eat besides blackberries, and some little boys who will like to play with me, and I shall be as happy as the days are long.'

So he comforted himself, and kept up his courage with these reflections as well as he could; and when the first night was gone and the morning had come again, he tried hard to forget how hungry he was, and began to do his utmost to amuse himself by watching the spiders near him spinning their webs, and a little colony of ants storing up food in their ant-house for the coming winter, and the bees going to and fro getting their honey from the flowers. But, though he tried to amuse himself with these things, yet every minute he was getting more and more hungry; and when midday had come, and he had eaten up all the blackberries that grew near the little cave's mouth, and when the long afternoon hours began to steal slowly on, and he thought of the dark, cold, weary



night that would presently return again, his spirit sank so low that if a very curious thing had not suddenly happened to him I almost think in a little more time he would have taken to his heels and run home again. But a very curious thing did happen.

Suddenly, as he was sitting, wearily enough, looking on the ground at those very little ants, who never ceased their work, to his amazement a clear small voice close to him all at once said, 'Ahem !' and, lifting up his head, his eyes grew as round as saucers with astonishment, and his heart jumped into his mouth, for what do you think he saw before him? At the entrance to his cave were two little figures standing, the like of which he had never beheld in all his life before. They were a pair of little men, not more than a foot high, dressed in the neatest and most dapper way, with crimson cloaks, and pointed hats, and white silk stockings gartered at the knee. They had most grave and serious faces, too, and they came forward, bowing their little peaked heads so solemnly that if he had been only a degree less frightened, Elidure would hardly have been able to keep from laughing. As it was, however, he was rather too much terrified to laugh,



and so he only scrambled to his feet, and stood holding his breath till one of the two little men began to speak. It was the elder who spoke first, in a grave, gentle voice.

‘Elidure, we have come here in search of you. You are hungry ; we will give you food. You have left your home ; come with us, and you shall find another home that you will never want to leave.’

‘Our country is near at hand,’ said the other little man, ‘and it is a land full of delight. We have everything that is beautiful there, and no sin or sorrow. Come with us, and we will lead you to it.’

When Elidure heard these civil speeches he took heart again, and almost laughed.

‘I certainly *am* most terribly hungry,’ said he.

‘Come, then, where food is awaiting you,’ said the first little man.

‘Well, staying here much longer, would be almost as bad as learning Latin.’

‘Nobody learns Latin in our country,’ answered the second little man.

The moment Elidure heard this, he felt that he could resist the little men’s invitation no longer.



‘What—nobody learns Latin? Then I certainly will come with you. And I should like to come at once, for I am getting so hungry that I hardly know what to do.’

No sooner had he made this answer than the two pigmies bowed again with great solemnity, and appearing highly satisfied, reached up their tiny hands, which were just able to touch the points of his fingers, and placing themselves one on either side of him, led him out of his hiding-place and into a curious subterranean way which opened suddenly before them, Elidure could not tell how. It was a long passage, that looked as if it was cut through a great rock. The light grew dim as they went through it, yet they could always see the way before them, and presently a sort of soft cloudy brightness came again. Then, all at once, the narrow passage widened, and Elidure saw stretched out before him a strange fair land, all beautiful with hills and streams and sweet green summer trees, yet all in miniature, like a landscape painted in a picture.

‘Is this your country?’ said Elidure, and looked about him for a minute, then burst out laughing. There was an apple-tree beside him, and the apples growing



on it were no bigger than green peas. He gathered a dozen of them (for, you see, he was so very hungry) and put them in his mouth together. 'They taste very good, but how will you ever get enough of them or of anything else to feed me with?' said Elidure, laughing still.

'Trust to us—we will find food for you,' answered the little men.

They still walked beside Elidure, one on either side of him; but, in a very few minutes after they had emerged from the subterranean way, whole troops of other little men began to gather round them, and women smaller even than the men, and children tinier than either. From all directions they came hurrying on, all neatly dressed in pretty-coloured clothes, with long fair hair, and all talking eagerly with shrill sweet voices. They spoke a language that Elidure had never heard before, and yet, in some strange way, he seemed to understand them as if they had been talking in his native Welsh, and even more than this, for presently—though how it came about he had not afterwards the least idea—he found himself too speaking this unknown tongue quite glibly, as though he had been accustomed to it all his life.



For a little while he and this crowd of tiny people with him walked on together, the two little men on either side of him conducting him with the greatest courtesy, and most civilly answering every question that he put to them about the curious new things he saw; for as they advanced they passed by many things that were wholly strange to him—houses and temples built in a fashion that he had never seen before, trees such as did not grow in the upper world, flowers of curious form and colour.

At last they came to a gorgeous and extensive building, which they told him was the palace of the king, and when they approached near to it,

‘We will enter here, and present you to his majesty,’ gravely said one of the little men.

‘Very good—only how in the world am I to get in?’ asked Elidure; and indeed he might very well put this question, for the palace was exactly like a very fine doll’s house, and unless Elidure had got into it crawling on his hands and knees (which would have been a very undignified way of making his entrance), it was hard to say how he was to reach the interior of it. The difficulty,



however, seemed to be one that till this moment had not struck either of the pigmies, for at Elidure's question they appeared to be taken quite aback.

'H'm,' exclaimed both the little men, and they suddenly stood still, and fell to stroking their beards, and thinking deeply.

'His majesty might perhaps grant you an audience out of doors,' said the first little man dubiously, after a few moments' consideration.

'He'll have to do that, or not to have it at all, I think,' answered Elidure bluntly; and, though this was not a very courtly speech, yet there was so much common sense in it that, without more ado, one of the little men went off and stated the perplexity that they were in to the king, and in five minutes more his majesty—who was apparently a very reasonable monarch—and all his lords in waiting were assembled round Elidure in the palace courtyard.

It was a very pretty sight, if Elidure had not been too hungry to care much about it, for the king was very handsome, and a full two inches taller than any of his subjects, and he, as well as all his courtiers, were most



gorgeously dressed in blue and crimson and cloth of gold ; but, in truth, poor Elidure was getting every moment more and more faint with hunger, and would rather just now have seen a loaf of good white bread before him than the most beautiful dresses or diamonds in the world. So when the king began to talk to him, as he very soon did in the most affable way, after he had first of all given him his hand to kiss, and graciously assured him of his protection, and introduced his son Prince Phos to him, and his daughter Princess Zoa—when, after all this, the king proceeded to invite him to take a seat upon the ground (civilly regretting that no chair in his dominions was of sufficient size and strength to hold him), and deliberately began a conversation with him about the upper world, then poor Elidure could bear it no longer. Unable to foresee how long the king might like to go on talking, he suddenly blurted out,

‘ If you please, your majesty, I’ve had no food since yesterday.’

‘ Dear me,’ exclaimed the king instantly, in a tone of great concern, ‘ no food since yesterday. You must be very hungry, then.’



‘I *am* very hungry,’ answered Elidure.

‘I should like to see you eat,’ said the king.

‘Anybody who likes may see me eat, if I only saw something that could be eaten.’

‘Bring some food instantly,’ said the king to some of his attendants, ‘and as speedily as possible let a sheep be roasted.’

Upon this half-a-dozen of the attendants hurried away, and in a very few minutes they had spread a table in the courtyard, and set upon it all the food that was in the palace larder. There was a nice little leg of mutton about three inches long, and a ham of much the same size, and a sirloin of beef that had just been cut an hour ago for the king’s luncheon. Elidure had scarcely been eating for ten minutes before all these different viands had wholly disappeared.

‘Prodigious!’ exclaimed the king, who was sitting staring at him with all his might. ‘Prodigious!’ echoed all the courtiers; and you could even hear the crowd in the distance that was gathered outside the courtyard murmuring ‘Prodigious!’ For, indeed, to these little people, it *was* of course a most amazing sight to see



sirloins of beef and legs of mutton vanishing one after another down Elidure's throat without his appetite appearing to be at all diminished by them. In fact, he not only cleared off all the cold meat before him, but, when it appeared, he ate so much of the roast sheep too, that by the time he rose up from table he left little but the bones behind him. 'Most amazing! most prodigious!' said his majesty again, lifting up his two tiny hands; for Elidure did really at last seem to have reached the completion of his meal.

While he had been eating, little Zoa had crept up to his side, and had stood for a time beside him as he sat upon the ground, looking at him with her soft blue eyes. She was a very tiny creature, for she was only a child, and Elidure, as he glanced at her, sometimes a little shyly, thought she was the prettiest little thing that he had ever seen in his life. Once or twice while he was having his dinner she put out her little fairy hand and touched him, and then smiled when he looked round.

'You are very big. Are all the men so big in your country?' she said wonderingly to him once.

Elidure began to laugh when she asked him this.



‘Why, I am only a boy,’ said Elidure; ‘our men are twice as big as I am.’

‘Twice as big! Oh dear! And do they eat twice as much too?’ asked Zoa then; and upon that Elidure blushed, and tried to explain rather shamefacedly how he was more than usually hungry to-day, but that he hoped at his next meal to astonish Zoa a little less. The child smiled again when he made this answer to her.

‘I hope you have had enough now. Don’t stop unless you have had quite enough,’ she said, in her tiny gracious voice.

There was a soft warm air throughout the place, and over everything a sort of veiled calm light, paler and cooler than sunlight.

‘Does the sun not shine here?’ Elidure asked one of the courtiers after his meal was ended, and the courtier shook his head with a little shudder.

‘The sunshine would scorch us up—we could not bear it,’ he replied. ‘No, there is no sunshine here. These soft clouds are always in the sky. If we had to live as you live in the upper world we should wither and fade away.’



After his dinner was ended, some of the courtiers had begun to talk to Elidure ; and they talked to him for a long time, and carried him away with them, and showed him many things that were new and strange. The king's son came with them too. He was older than Zoa, and tall and handsome like his father, and he was very courteous to Elidure, and asked him many questions about his former life ; but Elidure liked Zoa best, and when his walk with Prince Phos was ended, and they came back to the king's palace, his face brightened when he saw little Zoa sitting at one of the windows looking out. The child was glad too, for she clapped her hands at sight of Elidure, and laughed as he looked up.

‘I should like to come and play with you. May I come down and play with you?’ she called to him in her shrill little musical voice.

Even already a strange feeling of content and peace had begun to steal into Elidure's heart. All things were strange to him here, and yet he felt no fear of them ; before more than a day or two had passed it almost seemed to him as if he had known these friendly little



people, with their gentle faces and gentle voices, all his life. He found out quickly that the country to which he had come was one indeed, as they had told him, where life was a pure delight, for in all the land there seemed to be no trouble nor sorrow ; no man fought with his fellow man, nor strove to rise above the rest, nor stole, nor lied, nor treated others cruelly.

‘ In the upper world you struggle with one another, you cheat and murder, you trample the weak ones under foot,’ some of the pigmies would often say to him. ‘ We visit your world sometimes, and we know all this. You are like children and fools. You know no content, and no peace nor rest. *We* are happy because we seek for nothing. We neither struggle nor toil ; we know neither jealousy nor ambition, nor the love of riches, nor the desire of fame.’

Sometimes when they spoke to him thus Elidure would try to say, ‘ Nay, but we are happy too ;’ but generally he would only hang his head, for in truth it often seemed to him that in many things the pigmies were wiser than the men and women he had left.

‘ We are going to build a house for you,’ they told



him the day after he came amongst them, and that very day a whole multitude of them began the work. Elidure would have helped them, but they rejected his offer of assistance with some scorn. 'What do you know about building?' they said to him; and indeed he had to confess that his knowledge of that art was very small, and that they with their tiny hands could do most things much more dexterously than he.

So, without any aid from him, and in an amazingly short time, they constructed such a gigantic edifice that Elidure could really step in at the door of it without stooping his head, and lie down inside it at full length. They laughed with satisfaction and delight when this great business was accomplished, and never got tired afterwards of coming to visit him in his own house. It was such a pleasure to them that scores of them used to come together; the king himself came almost every day; even Prince Phos came—though between Prince Phos and Elidure there was a little stiffness that did not wear off for a good while—and, indeed, if he had chosen, he might have done nothing but sit still and hold a levee of pigmies from morning to night, and almost from night



to morning again. They were all the kindest little people too. Though a great monster like Elidure was unquestionably rather a formidable guest, you would have thought *they* thought it the most delightful thing in the world to have him in their country, and to enjoy the privilege of entertaining him, and providing the large quantity of food which he required. At first it was a little trying to Elidure to find that he was always expected to take his meals in public, with at least some hundreds of the curious little elves looking on, but after a time—especially when he saw how very much they enjoyed the sight—he got quite accustomed to their company, and only laughed when some of the most inquisitive amongst them would even come quite close to him, and perch upon his shoulder, or jog his elbow, or sit down in a circle round his plate. Perhaps, indeed, he felt when they were all so kind to him that it was the least he could do to afford them some little amusement in return. ‘I am sure I don’t know what makes you all so good to me,’ he would often say to them, feeling at moments quite honestly (for he was a simple, modest sort of lad) that he was really unworthy to be the object of such universal regard.



Worthy or unworthy, however, the elves took an endless pleasure in him, and he had but to show himself to them, or to do such simple things as walk, or run, or climb a tree, or leap across a river, to make them clap their tiny hands, and laugh with pure delight.

Though all the pigmies, from the king downwards, were very kind to Elidure, and Elidure in return liked them all, yet he had only one special friend—the king's daughter, little Zoa. From the very first Zoa and he had taken to one another. 'I should like to come and play with you,' Zoa had said trustingly to him the first day that he arrived, and on every day after he and she had played together, and spent long hours in one another's company over their quiet games. For Elidure was very gentle, and, big as he was, the child liked to have him for her playfellow. She was so little that he could almost have taken her and crushed her in his hand, but yet he was so tender over her that when she was with him she never had a moment's fear. They used to have all kinds of games together. He would lie down on the grass in the king's gardens, where they played the oftenest, and let her walk all over him, helping her little steps to mount



the hills and descend the valleys, laughing at her stumbles, and picking her up after every fall, and lifting her high in the air, till she shouted aloud with pleasure.

Then he would carry her often by the hour together, holding her at times upon his shoulder, at times nestled in his arms, she chattering away to him always, sometimes gaily, sometimes seriously—telling him curious little wise elfin stories, or talking baby nonsense to him ; and she would teach him games of which he had never heard before, and sing soft sweet little songs to him, and play dexterous tricks with golden balls that she tossed into the air. ‘ You care for gold up there in your foolish world,’ she said to him once. ‘ *We* only care for it here to play with it—so.’ And then she flung up the bright little balls above her head ; and sometimes when she threw them up she would catch them again as they fell, and sometimes would let them fall upon the ground and roll away. At first when they rolled away Elidure used to look for them and try to find them again for her, but she only laughed at him when he did that. ‘ Why should you gather them up ? I have plenty more of them,’ she would always say.

She used often to ask Elidure to tell stories to her,



and would put hundreds of questions to him about the world that he had left, and about his father and mother, and his little sister whom they used to carry about in long clothes. Zoa was never tired of making enquiries about this baby sister, but yet sometimes when she talked of her she used to grow sad. 'Some day you will want to go back and play with her. You will not care to play with me when your sister is old enough to run about, and take your hand, and go out with you into the fields.'

'Nay, I shall always want to play with you,' Elidure would answer. 'You are so gentle and kind. I shall never want any other playfellow than you.'

Then Zoa would brighten up again, and steal close to him, and stroke his hair and laugh, or lay her little cheek upon his hand. 'I hope you will remain a boy for a long, long time. It is so nice to be a child, and to play the whole day long,' she said to him once.

And indeed to Elidure, too, it seemed very pleasant in this peaceful new world to play the whole day long. How much sweeter it was than learning Latin, and being whipped when his lessons were ill-said? He used



to tell the history of all those old troubles of his to Zoa, till the child's eyes would flash and fill with tears in her indignation and sorrow for him. 'If they beat you and were cruel to you, you won't want to go back again to your own world?' she would sometimes wistfully say to him; and for a good while Elidure always answered readily, 'No, I don't want to go back again. I am happier here a thousand times;' at which Zoa used to smile and look glad.

But yet presently, even though he was so happy here, the boy's thoughts began to go back, with a vague sense of yearning to some of the things in the life that he had left; to the father who, though he had been a little strict, had still been kind to him; to the mother who had loved him so well, and whom he had loved.

'I wonder if they were very sorry when I went away. I should so like to see them again, just for a little while,' he said to Zoa once.

The child looked very sad.

'I could let you go, only if you went you would never come back again, and I should miss you so,' she sorrowfully replied.



‘Why do you think I would never come back again? I would come back gladly.’

But she still only shook her head; and then, when he saw that he made her so unhappy, he said no more that day.

From this time, however, the longing increased in him to return for a little while to his own home, and he began to ask her to get the king’s consent to let him go, and continued to beg her till she grew weary of refusing him.

‘I will speak to my father for you, then,’ she said sadly to him at last one day. ‘I wish you did not want to go, for only trouble will come of it; but if you cannot be content I will ask my father, and he will let you go.’

And then she told the king what Elidure wanted. His majesty was very angry at first, knitted his brows, and declared that he would not hear of it, and that if Elidure had come to elfin land, in elfin land he must be content to remain; but after a while, when he had had his anger out, then Zoa began to coax him; and he was so fond of her, and she coaxed him so prettily, that she ended by getting her own way. The king—though he



shrugged his shoulders, and said that he did not at all approve of it—finally consented to let Elidure go home to his father's house.

‘Only if he wants to come back again he must come back in a single day,’ said the king ; ‘and take care that he takes nothing belonging to us away with him, nor tells our secrets to anybody in the upper world.’ So then Zoa warned Elidure to do neither of these things, and told him how he must come again to her quickly, or she never should see him any more ; and finally said ‘Good bye’ to him, with her eyes full of tears.

‘We have been so happy all this time ; you should not have wanted to go away. When I am happy I never want any change to come, or any new thing,’ she said to him, and looked at him so sadly and reproachfully, that he could have almost had it in his heart to say that he would stay with her, and would not go back to earth at all.

But yet to do this, after the king had given him leave to go, and the two little men who had first conducted him hither were waiting by his side to take him back again, would have been too foolish ; so he gulped



down the feeling of remorse that had come to him, and comforting himself with the thought of how very soon he should come back again and play once more with Zoa, he told the two pigmies that he was ready, and they all set out upon their way.

The little men led him back by the same secret passage through which they had brought him, and in a very short space of time he found himself once more in the upper world. With a curious feeling he rubbed his eyes as he emerged into the clear full sunlight. How terribly bright it shone! How large everything was! How familiar and yet how strange the whole place looked! Far away he could see one of the turrets of the monastery above the trees; nearer to him there was a curling line of smoke rising from his own home.

‘I will run on and see my mother, and be back to you soon,’ he said to the little men. ‘Will you wait for me? Will you come back again if I call?’

‘You will find us here,’ they answered, ‘after sunrise to-morrow morning. Take your departure now, and return true to your time.’

So then Elidure, with his heart beating fast, set his face



homewards, and took his way over the hills he knew so well.

He did not know how long he had been away, but months at least must have elapsed. For it was no longer autumn with ripe fruits on the trees, but the young leaves of spring were bright and golden in the sunshine. Had all the winter passed over his head in that sweet quiet land where the seasons made no change? He went on fast—he almost ran. It was evening, and about this hour, he thought, his mother used to sit beside his sister's little bed, and sing to her till her eyes closed. As he approached the house did he not now, indeed, hear a sound of singing? He stood still and listened, and something rose up into his throat as he caught the tones of the familiar voice. His mother was singing, but the song had a sad sound; it ceased once, as if she was sighing while she sang. He stole unnoticed into the house, and crept softly up the stairs, and pushed aside the curtain that hung across the doorway of his sister's little room—and then all at once the boy burst into a kind of sob, and remembered nothing more till he found his arms clasped about his mother's neck.



You may imagine how much they had to say to one another, and how they talked all through the livelong night, sitting hand in hand with no others near them, for Elidure's father was a soldier and was away from home ; and in the house, except his mother and his baby sister, there were only two or three maids and serving-men, and an old nurse who had nursed Elidure when he was a little child. All night they sat and talked, and the poor mother told her boy how they had thought that he had drowned himself in the river, and how his father and she had mourned for him, and what she had suffered through all the dreary winter months. ' For I knew that you had been unhappy, my dear,' she said to him, ' and every stripe that they had given you seemed to have got burnt into my heart. But now that you have come back they shall not beat you any more. Nobody shall ever be harsh or unkind to you again, my child, nor shall you ever go back to the monks unless you like.'

Elidure hung his head, and for a little while had not the heart to tell her that he must return again to elfin land. But he was forced to confess this presently, and to withstand as well as he could all her reproaches and tears.



‘I must go, for I have promised, but I will try to come again,’ Elidure said. ‘If I do not break my word I think they will let me come again, dear mother. And I am very happy; they are all so good to me.’ And then he told his mother all about the life he led, and how little Zoa loved to have him for her playfellow.

It was a sad and yet a sweet long talk. ‘You must tell nobody that I have come back, lest they should try to keep me,’ Elidure said, and so his mother promised that she would tell no one; and all the night they talked, and then when morning came he rose up to leave her.

‘The little men will be waiting for me, mother,’ he said. ‘I must not keep them, or they will be angry and never let me come again;’ and he kissed her, and left her weeping, and went away.

But he, though he wept too at parting from her, ran fast away across the hills; and when he saw the little men again his heart leapt up with joy, and he laughed as he greeted them; and as they went through the subterranean way once more, it was as if at once he forgot his mother and all that he had left behind him; and everything he



seemed to care for was the sweet placid land that he was returning to, and little Zoa with her gentle face.

‘Ah, you have come back ! You are good. I will trust you now,’ Zoa said to him as they met again, and joyfully clapped her hands.

After this time Elidure was allowed occasionally, when he pleaded for it, to go back to the upper world for a few hours ; and presently, when the elves had become quite assured that he would not run away from them, they even discovered the secret of the subterranean way to him, and trusted him to go and come by it alone. But, though he was thus enabled almost at his will to see his father and mother, it was curious with what joy he always returned from these visits, and how, as time went on, his heart clung closer and closer to the life of elfin land. In the world above there seemed so many sorrows ; his mother’s face looked often sad and wan ; his father’s talk was about wars and strifes ; even his little sister seemed to have her baby troubles, and wailed and sobbed sometimes pitifully enough. But here neither did men fight, nor did women and children weep. The placid days followed one another undisturbed by turmoil or



grief. There was no wild merriment in the land, yet no sorrow either ; only a composed and sweet contentment, without break or change. For they never knew sickness here, nor death.

‘Yes—up there in your world you die ; that must be terrible,’ Zoa said one day to him, and shudderingly nestled close up to his side. ‘It must be this that makes you all so sad. How can you care for anything, when Death can come to-day or to-morrow and take you all away?’

She asked him this, looking up to him with puzzled solemn eyes. She used often to ask curious questions of Elidure, trying hard with her little elfin mind to understand the things he told her. ‘How can you be happy when you have to die?’ she said ; and then, on this day hesitating and shyly, Elidure tried for the first time to tell her how, for those whom Death took away, apart from their first world and beyond it, far away, there was another world where, if they had lived purely here, they should dwell and be happy for evermore. ‘For there is a great King there,’ Elidure said, ‘who reigns above all the earth, and loves us, and watches over us always, and



when we die we go to Him where He sits upon His great white throne ; and there are angels singing for ever before Him ; such sweet songs, Zoa, sweeter even than those you sing ; sweeter than all the songs that were ever sung before, either on earth or in elfin land.'

' I should like to hear them,' Zoa said.

And then, after that day, the child never used to tire of asking him questions about those angels, and the distant place they lived in, and what they did all day, and who the King was on His great white throne. And once she said to him, ' Do you want to go there ? ' and laid her cheek upon his hand, and, for the first time he ever saw her do it, began to weep. ' Some day, if you get tired of us, we shall not be able to make you stay ; we shall have to let you go away,' she sadly said.

But Elidure did not want to go away. It seemed to him that if he could live on as he was living now for ever, he should care for nothing more or nothing better in all earth or all heaven. Was he not happy here the whole day long ? His mother used to mourn over him, and hold him in her arms when he went to see her, and utter bitter reproaches against the elves who kept him



from her ; but when she spoke harshly of them the blood would rush hotly into Elidure's face, for he loved the friendly little people who treated him so kindly. Gradually, as he lived with them, his heart got more and more weaned from the common cares and interests of the upper world : the love of riches, the love of fame, the struggle amongst men for place and power, as his father sometimes talked about before him—these things seemed to him like childish follies ; he would turn away weary from hearing of them. Why should men fight so, and wear out their lives, when they might gain the peace and rest of elfin land ?

‘How you labour here for gold ! Why, with us in fairyland we only make gold into playthings,’ he exclaimed once, with a pitying laugh.

‘Eh, but they must be fine playthings, then,’ his old nurse replied. ‘Wonderful fine playthings ; I'd like to see them.’ And after this the old woman was for ever talking to him about the golden toys that Zoa had, and what a pity it was they could not get them here.

She was a very old woman, who had lived in the household all her life ; and Elidure loved her, and she loved



him as if he had been her own child. He had always liked to be with her in former days, for she had a gift of story-telling, and ever since he could understand anything he had been accustomed to sit upon the ground beside her, listening to her stories. She used to tell them to him yet, but he cared for them less now than he had done of old. He cared more now to talk to her of elfin land, and about his companion Zoa, and how happily they spent the long calm days, playing and talking, and never tiring of one another; and often he would tell her of the clever things that Zoa could do, and specially of how she could take those golden balls, and toss them up one after the other in the air, so that they rose and fell and rose and fell again like a little shower of golden stars.

It was curious how much the old woman liked to hear of this trick. She would make Elidure tell her about it again and again, and describe the balls, and how they looked and shone.

‘And I wonder what should hinder you from bringing home a handful of them in your pocket some day, dearie?’ she said coaxingly to him at last one afternoon. ‘You



might just slip them in, and nobody would be the wiser, I should think.'

But Elidure flushed up hotly when she said this.

'I couldn't bring any home. It would be stealing,' he said.

'And do you think I'd ask you to steal?' cried the old woman indignantly. 'Stealing, do you call it, to pick up a bit of something that nobody cares for! Why, if you filled your pockets here with pebbles and carried them off to Mistress Zoa, do you think we'd call that stealing?' And she looked so hurt and angry that Elidure could only beg her pardon, and say quite humbly that of course he knew she was the most honest woman in the world; but still the golden balls did not belong to him, and indeed he could not feel comfortable in taking them.

The old woman said no more to him that day; but constantly afterwards, whenever he returned home, she fell to talking to him again about the balls; and gradually she wearied him so, by coaxing him and begging him incessantly to bring some home to her, that at last after a long time he got wholly tired of refusing what she asked; and one day, at length, when he bade



good bye to her, he promised faithfully he would bring her some of the golden balls.

That day, for the first time, he returned to elfin land with a curiously heavy heart. He tried to persuade himself that he had done nothing that was wrong, and that there really could not be any harm, when the elves cared so little about gold, in giving away some of their little balls; but yet, try as he would, he could not quiet his conscience, nor make himself feel at ease when he came back within sight of little Zoa, and heard her call him in her joyous voice, and saw her stretch out her welcoming arms.

All that evening he played with her, but he was not happy in his play.

‘They have tired you up there. They have tired you, and I don’t think you care for me,’ Zoa said gravely to him once.

‘I care for you more than for anything in all the world,’ Elidure said.

Nevertheless Zoa did not smile, but only looked at him sadly and shook her head.

‘They have vexed you and made you sad,’ she said.



Why do you not stay with us? We never vex you here. Will you stay now, and not go away again for a long long time?’

‘Indeed I would stay gladly,’ he answered her, ‘but I must go once more very soon, because I have promised.’

‘If you have promised you must go, surely,’ she replied. ‘But after that will you stay? Shall we play all day together then, and will you be content?’

‘Yes, I will be very content to stay with you,’ he answered. ‘I want nothing so much as that; I should like to stay just like this without any change, for ever.’

‘That is good!’ the child answered, and then gave a little laugh, and began to play again; and Elidure, too, played with her; but yet, though he played he could not forget his promise, nor be happy any more because he had made it.

It troubled him so much that he thought, just to get it off his mind, that he would go the very next day, and take his nurse the golden balls; and then he would not go home again for ever so long, but would stay quietly with Zoa, and not let himself be teased or tempted any



more. 'Not that what I am going to do is *really* a wrong thing,' Elidure said to himself—for, naturally, he was trying hard to persuade himself that it was not wrong—'only the elves are sometimes so particular that it makes one uncomfortable; and so if it is to be done at all, I had better do it quickly and get it over.' And accordingly he resolved that early in the morning he would put a dozen of the little golden balls into his pocket, and run straight home with them, and be back again almost before Zoa knew he had gone away. He would go so quickly, he thought; he could be back with Zoa almost as soon as she was ready to play. He went to sleep saying this to himself; and in the morning, as soon as ever it was light, he rose and went to the king's garden and picked up a dozen of the golden balls, which, indeed, were lying about upon the grass very nearly as though they were as common as bits of pebble; and putting them in his pocket, away he went as fast as his legs could go.

He ran along the subterranean way faster and faster, and the further he ran the louder did his heart beat. Somehow, after a time, it seemed to him, in some strange



way, as if he was running a race. He almost thought he heard footsteps behind him ; more than once he fancied he heard a shout ; and yet it could not be so, for once when he stopped and listened all was still, nor in the half light could any one be seen. 'It is only fancy—there is no one there,' he said to himself, and took breath a moment, and then ran on again. Perhaps it was the noise of the little balls jingling in his pockets ; perhaps it was some sound from the upper world that he had heard.

So he ran still on and on till he reached the further end of the subterranean passage, and emerged into the full light of day ; and then on again, faster still, he went over the hills, through the meadows with the grass all wet with dew—on, without pause, and with his heart beating now as if it would burst his breast. For once more in the broad sunlight he had looked behind him, and now he had seen that the fear he had had all along was true ; the elves, with flying footsteps and threatening shouts, were pursuing him over hill and dale.

What should he do ? Should he turn back ? He thought, in his first terror and anguish, that he would



throw himself down at their feet, and confess that he had done wrong, and give them back their golden balls. For a moment he paused ; but the next, his shame overwhelmed him, and he felt as if he could not do it. Faster and faster he fled on. If he could but reach his father's door, and rush in, and close it against them, surely he should be safe, he thought.

On like the wind he went, and quicker and quicker followed the tiny footsteps after him. He turned his head once—the pigmies were but a stone's cast behind him ; a minute later, and they were not twenty paces off. One final effort now, to reach the door ! He ran with his last breath and reached it ; but as his feet touched the threshold, invisible arms seized him from behind like iron claws, and he fell prostrate. A mist came over his senses, his eyes closed ; and when he came to himself again he was lying weak and faint and bruised upon his mother's bed, with the two pockets that had held the golden balls empty, and turned inside out.

Elidure turned his face to the wall, and wept for a long time with passionate and bitter tears. It was in vain that his mother tried to comfort him. ' They will never



let me go back to them ; they will never let me live with them any more,' was all he said. Now, when it was too late, it seemed to him that he had been mad to do what he had done. Had he been under a spell, that he had acted so wickedly? Was that old woman a witch, that she had tempted him to do this evil thing?

For days the boy could hardly be got to lift his head, or eat, or speak. His mother in her heart was glad, for she said to herself ' Now I shall have my child again ; ' but Elidure's spirits seemed dead within him ; he could not return her caresses ; he could not smile when his little sister laughed and sang. He wanted Zoa back, and the little elves who had been so friendly to him, and the land below with its peaceful light, and the quiet life where no sorrow came.

After many days of suffering, though he said to himself ' If I go back they will kill me in their anger,' unable to rest, he stole away one morning from his father's house, and took the way that led to the secret passage into the under world. But when he came to the well-known place he could not find the entrance, though he searched for it hour after hour. There was no opening anywhere,



no sign of any elfin road. Desolate and broken-hearted, he flung himself down upon the ground, and lay there till night came.

Day after day and week after week he came back, and lying with his face upon the grass, cried to the friends he had offended to pardon him and take him back, and to Zoa to let him come and play with her once more : but all in vain. There was no answer to his cries; no sign of the little men who had been once so kind to him : the closed entrance never re-opened, and through all the years that he afterwards lived on earth Elidure never saw the face of little Zoa again.

He grew to be a man, and then lived on and on till he was very old. He became a monk in that monastery in the valley, and led a pious life, doing good to many people, and spending much time in prayer. But through his whole life it was always said there remained a strange kind of cloud upon him, and he used to look as one who saw visions or spent long days in dreams. Sometimes, to a few people, he would tell the story of the years that he had passed in elfin land; but as he grew older he became fonder of silence than of speech,



and, when he was not telling his beads, loved best to sit on the sunny seat beneath the monastery wall, with his dim eyes fixed on the far-off hills.

‘My earthly delight came thence,’ he said once to one of the monks who had come and sat down beside him. And, after a little silence—‘She must have been angry with me once, but I think she has forgiven me now. God has forgiven me too, I know. I have yearned for her and have not found her; but the end of life is near at last, and after this world there comes another—and God is great.’



*THE WITCH OF ARGOGUES.*

**B**EHIND the ramparts and battlements of the old château of Argouges there lived a good knight, who had fought in the Crusades.

He was a member of a noble family, so noble that the knight would have thought he had failed in the duty he owed to his dead ancestors who slept under the pavement of the little church hard by, as well as to the children who might yet be born and live to bless him, if he had not gone to the Holy Land to fight for the recovery of the sepulchre of our Lord. He had therefore quitted his château and his farm-lands, his servants, and his beloved forests, leaving his vassals as well as his revenue in the hands of his mother, the lady of Argouges.

She was a daughter of the house of Balleroy, and as



great a lady as ever lived. Every morning, after the departure of her son, she caused two wax tapers, each the weight of a man, to be lighted before the altar of the Holy Virgin. Her chaplain grew quite rich from the sale of so many pounds of wax ; for he was very careful to put out the tapers as soon as the devotions of the lady were finished. Meanwhile the poor serfs of the domain toiled and groaned in the fields, mercilessly oppressed by the steward. Poor man, in one sense he could not do otherwise ; for had he not to provide for the equipment of the lord of Argouges when he went to the Holy Land ? Besides, there was the wax merchant's bill to pay every month. 'Our Blessed Lady ought to be weary of seeing so many tapers burnt, when they are drawn from the blood of the poor,' said the boldest of the peasants. But their more pious wives bade them hold their tongues. 'Let us pray the Holy Virgin to send back our good knight, and then his mother will not need to burn any more tapers before the altar.'

Alas ! the lady died before her son returned. For two years she had received no news of him, and had in vain interrogated all the pilgrims who passed the château,



entertaining them hospitably and listening eagerly to their stories, true or false. But in spite of all her questions not one of them could tell her anything of the lost knight's fate. One pilgrim returning from Joppa, without being able to reach Jerusalem, then in the hands of the powerful Saladin, owned one day that he had heard of a brave and noble Norman, a prisoner in a dungeon not far from Joppa, who perhaps, might be the knight of Argouges.

But the mother rose with indignation from the large carved wood chair which she occupied within the spacious ingle or fireplace.

'Denis d'Argouges is not a prisoner like a rat in a trap,' said she. 'Either he is still fighting against the infidel, or he is dead.'

The pilgrim retired in silence; but the lady's heart was broken. To suffer so much, and suffer ingloriously, without hearing whether her son lived or died, was too much for her fortitude. One morning the impatient chaplain observed that her prayers were greatly prolonged; the large tapers were half burnt out, and the lady still knelt before them. He gently pushed the cushion on which she knelt with his foot, and she fell forward on



the steps of the altar. Death had overtaken her while praying for her son.

All the vassals came to see her lying in state in the church, surrounded by the monks of the monastery which she had founded on her estate.

'She is a saint in heaven,' whispered they, making the sign of the cross ; 'let us hope she will pray for us as she prayed on earth for the good knight our lord.'

God had been merciful to the noble lady in taking her to her rest : her maternal pride and her haughty confidence had equally misled her. Her son, the lord of Argouges, whose deeds she expected would equal the exploits of Tancred or of Godfrey of Bouillon, was a miserable captive in the castle of an Emir, without having fought at all. He was the prisoner of an infidel, and had, moreover, yielded to another temptation worse than cowardice—he was in love with an infidel lady. The daughter of the Emir, touched by pity for his sufferings, had fallen desperately in love with the Norman knight. Although she could not speak the French tongue, she, in spite of the women and the slaves who guarded her, succeeded in finding her way to the dungeon and in



making the prisoner understand her. She entreated, she promised; and the Christian, regardless of his baptism, allowed himself to be persuaded to fly—ingloriously, ignominiously, as no good knight should. In a voice as sweet as the murmur of clear water over pebbles, the lady unfolded her projects and her hopes. ‘But,’ said she, in conclusion—and the Norman with astonishment saw her tremble in every limb—‘when we are married, take care never to speak before me of *death*, or some great misfortune will befall us.’

The knight did not comprehend all the lady’s meaning; but in the imprecations of the infidels on the battle-field he had often heard the word *death*; and as he saw the terror depicted on the face of the Emir’s daughter, he pressed her in his arms and promised all she desired.

The next day the lovers fled towards Joppa, borne by horses swifter than the wind. The heaps of gold which the princess carried with her did not impede their progress. They found it easy to obtain a ship returning to Europe. Many pilgrims, tired of the vain results of the efforts of the Christians to reach Jerusalem, were awaiting the return of Melek Rik, as the infidels called the



English king, Richard Cœur de Lion. Exaggerated hopes were founded on his courage and zeal. But while the brave king languished unknown in a German castle, the hopes of the Crusaders left in the Holy Land every day diminished ; Genoese and Venetian vessels quitted Joppa continually, bearing away sick and wounded knights and squires, who broke their vows that they might return to their own country.

Hidden on board the French knight's ship remained the infidel princess. No man had ever seen her without her veil, except it might be when a puff of wind had blown the light tissue aside. The sailors then saw two great black eyes, shining so brilliantly that they crossed themselves, whispering, ' The lord of Argouges is taking home a fairy ! She has bewitched him. May God keep us from harm ! '

But the favourable wind never ceased to blow for a single minute ; the ship glided rapidly over the waves. If the sailors gave a thought to the enchantments of the lady, their terror was mingled with satisfaction. They had never made so prosperous a voyage—the coast of France was in sight already.



Denis d'Argouges entertained no suspicion regarding the mysterious nature of his wife's gifts. Every day he was more in love with her; more enchanted with her beauty, wit, and grace. He had taught her to speak Norman, and the lady now only employed the soft accents of her native tongue to sing to her husband in the evening.

When he took her in his arms to lift her from her horse at the door of the old seignorial castle, his eyes flashed with pride to think how lovely she was. He withdrew the veil she still wore, saying, 'In this country the women uncover their faces, my beauty!' and he watched with delight his dazzled vassals admiring the delicate shape, the refined features, and the sparkling eyes, of the stranger he had brought home.

The bride turned gracefully, and made a sign of welcome to all these peasants—a welcome, however, in which there was mingled not a little fear. Then she took her husband's arm again, and they entered the castle. The vassals remained at the door, hoping the lady would reappear, but the steward presently came and dispersed them somewhat roughly. Two women alone, of all the



crowd, lingered in the great court. One of them was old Marie, who had carried the knight in her arms when he was a little baby, and been through his childhood his faithful nurse ; she was pale, and her hands trembled on her stick. Beside her stood a young girl, large, strong, and bold looking, with flaxen hair, and a resolute voice. The old woman was silent, but the young one spoke : ‘ Say to the lady,’ said she, ‘ that I will come to-morrow to speak to her, as I know she wants a waiting-woman.’

The steward smiled scornfully. He had already destined his daughter, the pretty Alienor, for the post to which the big Manou aspired ; but the latter quietly repeated what she had said, and left the courtyard of the château with Marie, turning round as she went to look at the light of the large fires burning in the kitchen. But the old nurse wept, and devoutly told her beads.

The steward had presumed too much on his position in the castle, and on the influence he formerly exercised over his master. When he presented himself with Alienor at the door of the lady’s apartment, it was opened by big Manou. She did not smile as her adversary had



done the day before, but a flash of triumph lighted up her pale blue eyes. The steward, vexed and confused, retired without making any enquiry, or even presenting his daughter to the lady of Argouges.

Alienor went away the next day to visit one of her aunts in the convent of Bayeux, and Manou remained sole mistress of the field, jealously watched by the steward, whom she had made her enemy the first hour she set foot in the castle.

From that time no one ever saw the lady without immediately meeting the big Manou. The servants joked about this continual companionship between the mistress and maid, and wondered if the knight's wife preferred Manou's company even to her husband's.

The oriental princess spoke little, and her maid less, outside ; but inquisitive people who listened at their door distinctly caught imperious tones, clearly those of Manou, and retired surprised and puzzled, without daring to utter their conjectures.

The lady and her maid were never separated during the day and at night Manou slept in a room adjoining that of her mistress. But the connection between them



seemed more like that of a prisoner and her jailer than a rich and beautiful young lady and her poor ignorant servant, who had no beauty at all.

The steward tried in vain to penetrate this mystery. He had enough to do in trying to prevent another misfortune, the bare thought of which filled him with exceeding grief.

The only one in the château who liked big Manou was his own son—the handsome, good, and intelligent young Yves, whom the father had destined to succeed him in his office, to the great comfort of the vassals of Argouges.

‘Yves is bewitched,’ said his father, mournfully. ‘Ay, just as much as our mistress is, only he loves this witch with yellow hair; and, if I am not deceived, the lady of Argouges both hates and fears her.’

Every day Manou left her captive mistress for a short time and glided into the garden, running like a hare between the rows of trees, without ever crushing her beautiful dress or soiling the dainty shoes she chose to wear in imitation of her mistress. And every day, whatever the hour might be, she found the steward’s son waiting



for her. His father wanted to send him to a distance to stay with some relations ; but Yves, usually very submissive, refused to go. ' Father, I cannot quit this place,' was all he said, and neither entreaties nor anger could extract a word more from him.

For a few days the steward had hoped that a new interest was about to distract his son from the enthralment which attached him to the steps of the waiting-maid.

The gamekeeper of the forest came one day to the château, and related that a large dog, of an extraordinary shape and colour, was every night chasing the stags, and had even attacked the wild boars, which it roused from their lairs, and made fly before it wild with terror. The keepers had pursued this creature for a week without catching it. It had several times passed in front of their ambuscades, but it ran so swiftly, and its movements were so unexpected, that neither stick nor arrow had been able to reach it. Still, such was its fierceness, that the wild deer were beginning to desert the forest, and to go to the neighbouring woods.

The keeper's story aroused young Yves from the torpor



in which he was always plunged—when not in the presence of his beloved one. He made an appointment with the keepers, and promised to meet them in the forest that same night.

At midnight, by the light of the moon, when the watchers were in their hiding-place, the dog appeared pursuing a deer, which was flying in terror. Other kinds of game started out from their lairs mad with fear; but the dog ran on, barking incessantly, not biting or attacking the timid creatures it was pursuing, but simply following—neither stopping or turning round, and leaping over every obstacle. Presently it reached a glade where Yves and the chief gamekeeper lay in ambush. The two men bounded into the open space, bow in hand. For an instant the dog stopped, and looked at Yves with an expression of amazement. This pause sufficed. The forester drew his bow, and his arrow pierced the creature's shoulder. With a long, almost human cry, it dropped, and disappeared like a flash of lightning.

Yves remained in his place, petrified with fear and astonishment. His trembling hands could no longer hold



his bow ; he staggered like a drunken man, and fell to the ground.

With great difficulty they took him back to the château. Proud as they were of having succeeded in wounding the detested dog, they were uneasy and alarmed at the sudden illness of the young man. 'That wicked beast has cast an evil eye on him,' said they.

It was indeed true. Yves could not rest in his bed, so disturbed was he by foolish doubts and wild imaginations. When the mysterious dog looked at him, he fancied in its great reproachful eye he recognised eyes that he loved.

When day came and relieved him of these distressing fancies, he learned from the lady's servants that her maid was in bed—ill, they supposed, for no one had ever penetrated to her room—and she had sent her excuses to her mistress without opening her door.

Two days Manou was absent, and when she reappeared was very pale. Yves met her in a corridor, and read reproach in her eyes, but she would not speak to him ; and she did not come any more to the garden, where the steward's son waited for her in vain.



Meanwhile the affairs of the lord of Argouges prospered in all directions ; his land was covered with the richest crops ; in all his numerous flocks not a beast fell ill ; several estates had come to him by inheritance.

‘Certainly the lady is good and pious, and draws on him heaven’s blessing,’ said the people round about. ‘Yet she never comes to church, and says her prayers in her room. And some declare she is an infidel, and has never been baptised.’

‘That is impossible,’ replied the old women. ‘Our good Saint Michael has always blessed the lords of Argouges, and would not let a son of the house marry an infidel.’

Besides, the lady’s two sons, handsome and strong as their father, had both been taken to church from their birth. Their mother seemed very fond of them, but she did not nurse them herself, and she had often been seen weeping beside their cradle.

After a time the mysterious dog again re-appeared in the forest. It was in the month of May ; the new leaves covered the trees with a rich verdure. The apple-trees were pink with blossoms when the lord of Argouges



announced his intention of going on a pilgrimage to the convent founded by his mother, and of taking his two sons to pray at her tomb. Their own mother had been ill for several days, and their father had been heard to raise his voice angrily to his wife when alone with her in her room.

She was to accompany the party half way, and when the horses were led into the court the knight was still waiting for his wife. She appeared at length, so pale that she seemed scarcely able to support herself, but she refused the hand that Manou offered her, and came down the rough stone stairs alone. The lord of Argouges, who had chafed much at her delay, was already in his saddle. 'By my Patron St. Denis,' said he sharply to his wife, 'such a lazy woman as you would be a good person to send for Death! You would not fetch him in a hurry.'

While he yet spoke, the lady, uttering a feeble cry, fell down on the door-steps. Her servants, hastening to raise her, recoiled in terror. There was nothing but her clothes—the gown, the embroidered mantle, the long veil. The lady herself had disappeared.



‘She warned me of this,’ murmured the knight, as he sprang from his horse. ‘She was a witch,’ whispered the attendants. ‘Everybody knows that witches cannot bear to hear the word *death*, because they are condemned to live for ever, without the hope of salvation.’

All shrank away in horror, allowing the rich clothes to lie where they fell. Not the poorest, not those most greedy of gain, would have thought of touching them.

Manou had disappeared at the same time as her mistress.

On that night the steward was himself in the forest with the hunters. The incoherent words of his son, and a sort of prophetic instinct of his own, led him to connect his sorrows with the dog’s nocturnal appearances in the wood. He had once been a great sportsman; and his bow, which he had unhooked from the walls with a sigh, still bent under his strong hands. The forest resounded with mournful cries; it seemed as if all the demons had joined with the mysterious dog to chase the timid game. Everywhere the frightened deer, the hares, the



rabbits, even the wild boars, rushed out, striking themselves against the trunks of the trees in their terrified flight.

The steward had been some time waiting. When the dog at length appeared, more furious and eager for pursuit than ever, an arrow was shot from the faithful bow, and the dog fell. That instant—oh strange mystery!—not a dog, but a woman, fell to the ground, apparently in the agonies of death. It was Manou. She lay a moment at the feet of the steward, and then vanished—to be seen no more for ever.

People said that the two witches—mistress and maid, the latter being the more powerful of the two—had thus been punished together. But people said many untrue and cruel things then—as they do even now. The real truth nobody ever knew.

Yves was cured of his love, but fell a prey to remorse for having loved a wicked woman. He entered a monastery. The children of the lady of Argouges grew up without knowing the name and history of their mother, and the only traces remaining of the enchantment which once surrounded the château of Argouges are to be



seen in the gradual ruin which has little by little extinguished their once powerful family. The tradition of this witch-ancestress is, however, still preserved by the curious motto they bear on their arms—‘À la Faye.’



*FANCHOMICK'S FAIRY GIFTS.*

**B**ARBAIK was a rich old woman of Brittany. She had cows and sheep, fields to plough, and corn to thresh. But she was a miser; and, because she was afraid of being robbed, would never have a servant of any kind to sleep under her roof. Every evening the tired labourers who had been working for her went home to their cottages with their implements on their shoulders, and Barbaik remained alone in the house with her niece Fanchomick.

Poor Fanchomick had little rest. Her aunt did not even allow her time to arrange her hair, and sew bows on her dress like other girls. After working hours she was kept up till midnight churning the day's milk; and she hardly got anything to eat, the thickest soup and



the best wheaten pancakes being reserved for the labourers, whose food was given as part of their wages. The worst of everything sufficed for the orphan whom Barbaik had received into her house against her will, and from fear lest the whole parish should rise up against her if she allowed her own flesh and blood to be dependent on charity. Fanchomick often wept as she milked her cows.

‘I wish I were dead,’ said she. ‘I am sure my aunt must have been baptized with the water meant for boys, for she has a beard like a man, and there is not so unkind a creature on all the country side.’

As time advanced Barbaik did not grow less unkind, but more, and continued to make Fanchomick work beyond her strength. But after a while the poor girl no longer wept; she sometimes even sang at her work, and her step quickened when she returned from the fields with her pail on her head, though alas! she often carried it so carelessly that the branches of the trees dipped into the milk; for, at the corner of the old kiln, the labourer Steven was waiting for her. Fanchomick now found time to tie her hair with bright ribbons, but she hid them when she returned to the house; for Barbaik would not



have failed to enquire whence she got such adornments; and the poor girl would not have dared to say that Steven had brought her the rose-coloured bow, the copper ring, and the silver cross, from the Midsummer fair in the Pays de Vennes.

Steven was strong and handsome, as well as clever; not that he could read books, but he had been brought up by an old priest, who had told him the history of the creation of the world and of the coming of the Son of God on earth. From his cradle his mother had made him familiar with the legends of Brittany, and he repeated them to Fanchomick while they sat hidden behind the old wall. She loved also to hear him sing—

The heart thou gavest me, O my love,  
I have taken so close to mine;  
That now I cannot tell which it is,  
My heart, or thine.

But once, while Steven sang in a voice so low as to be audible only by his beloved, the hard tones of the old mistress were heard in the distance.

‘Idle Fanchomick! What are you doing in the meadow? The lambs are at the door, and want to be taken to their mothers.’



And Fanchomick, trembling, took up her milk-pail and ran away, without daring to look behind her.

One morning she was washing at the fountain. Her aunt had awakened her before sunrise ; the rosy tints of dawn scarcely coloured the clouds floating in the sky ; the grass was still wet with dew, the little birds were asleep in their nests ; and Fanchomick sadly thought that at the accustomed hour Steven would wait for her behind the old wall in vain. The bundle of linen was so large that the young girl's arms ached before she had washed the half of it. ' If there is little, she will do no more than that little, and if there is much she will be obliged to do it,' said the aunt, and had doubled the task.

Suddenly, as Fanchomick, resting her tired hands a minute on the heavy beetle used for washing, raised her eyes and looked about, she saw before her an old woman, with a wallet on her shoulder, leaning on a stick. Her feet were wet with dew, her gray hair had escaped from her cap, and she seemed far too old and feeble to be thus wandering about alone. Fanchomick rose, dropping the sheet she had just washed.

' Sit down, mother,' said she, pushing her bundle of dry linen towards the old woman. ' It does not seem right



that those with grey hair and trembling steps should be out so early in the morning.'

'Alas! my daughter,' said the beggar, dropping heavily on the improvised seat; 'when one has neither child to support one nor roof to shelter one, one must trust in God and beg one's bread.'

Two little tears trembled on the eye-lashes of the old woman, but did not fall. For those who have grown so old as to lose all natural ties, the fountain of tears is dried up, and they seldom weep.

Fanchomick searched in her basket for a piece of black bread—all her aunt had given her—which she had rubbed over with bacon, that she might not need to return to the house to breakfast.

'Eat, mother,' said she, offering the bread to the beggar. 'I have no appetite this morning. I am more disposed to cry than eat,' added she, in a low tone, 'for Steven is sure to be angry with me.'

The old woman looked at Fanchomick as she broke the bread.

'Fasting is good for the body, and charity refreshes the soul,' said she in an under tone; 'but a young girl's tears



do not flow for nothing. . Why are you heavy-hearted, my child ?'

'I shall not see Steven to-day,' sobbed Fanchomick.

Barbaik was known for ten miles round, so that the beggar had no need to ask Fanchomick why she was so overwhelmed with work that she had not an instant to give to her lover. She took a large pin out of the body of her gown.

'Here,' said she, 'when you put this pin into your neck-handkerchief, your aunt will suddenly be seized with a desire to count her cabbages in the garden, and you may talk at your ease to Steven without fearing that she will call you. She will only tire of counting when you take out the pin.'

Fanchomick's spirit rose: she sat thinking pleasant thoughts; till, waking up, she found that the old woman had eaten her bread and had slowly gone on her way. 'Kind soul!' said the girl; and immediately began to rub and beat with so much zeal that the heap of dirty linen lessened under her hands, as if by magic.

At noon, when the labourers were at table eating their black bread and haricot soup in silence, Barbaik, who



from the far end of the table counted every piece of bread and every glass of cider they took, suddenly rose and went out by the back door of the farm-house.

The men raised their eyes in astonishment ; they were not accustomed to be left thus to themselves, free to eat as much as ever they liked.

'Is the mistress ill?' said the tailor. He was at the farm that day, mending clothes which were so very old that the fabric would not bear the needle.

No one answered. The door opened softly, and Fanchomick appeared tottering under her load. The heavy wet sheets were thrown across her neck and shoulders. She raised her head, and cast a rapid glance round the room.

'Your aunt is not here,' said two or three of the men at the same time. 'She went out just now into the garden, as if the devil himself had carried her off.'

Fauchomick reddened violently, and put her hand to her kerchief; the pin was there, hidden in the folds. She then hastily put down the linen and went out.

Barbaik was counting her cabbages. She went from one bed to another, making her calculations over and



over again, feeling the leaves and adjusting the stalks. There was no fear of her disturbing Fanchomick and Steven, who talked comfortably behind the brick-kiln for a good hour or more.

Henceforth the lovers met morning, noon, and night, without dread of being surprised. The power of the pin was irresistible. But if a secret spell drew the old woman to the garden, the same magic worked different ways. The young peasant was no longer drawn to Fanchomick by the same attraction as of old. Barbaik's niece was not particularly pretty or nicely dressed, and Steven had at first made love to her just to vex his mistress. The poor girl listened to his soft words affectionately; but when they ceased to be tender, when at length he grew almost silent or cross, she raised her sad eyes to him and sometimes wept, but never complained. After a little while Steven was no longer punctual at the place of meeting, and Fanchomick turned away her head when she passed the old wall in coming home from work. Nobody was waiting for her now.

One day the girl was again at the fountain. She fell on her knees at the edge of the water, and wept so



bitterly that she did not hear the sound of steps. All at once a hand was laid on her shoulder, and the old beggar said in her ear,

‘Why do you cry, my child, when you are young and can see your lover?’

‘For me to see him he must come to see me,’ answered Fanchomick, ‘and to keep him when he is come, one must be as clever as he is.’

The old woman smiled sadly.

‘Are not your blue eyes enough to keep him?’ said she in a low tone. ‘Wait a moment;’ and she blew in the air, and a little white feather floated in an instant above the head of the young girl and rested on her hair, as if a bird had dropped it from its wing.

‘You will now have enough wit to please all the wise men in the world.’

Fanchomick shook her head gaily, while a new intelligence lighted up her eyes.

‘I only want to please one peasant lad,’ said she, softly.

That evening, when Steven almost by chance appeared at the rendezvous, where Fanchomick never



failed to come, he was in no hurry to go away. He had never in all his life been so much amused.

'I had no idea a woman could be so clever,' said he to himself when he returned home to his cottage and remembered the touching stories, the quick-witted speeches, and the gay songs of Fanchomick.

For some time the girl's happiness knew no bounds. She had regained her lover, and was never tired of seeing in his eyes the admiration she awakened. Formerly it used to be she who stood astonished at his wit and knowledge, now it was Steven's turn to be astonished at hers.

But time passed on, meeting succeeded meeting, and Steven began to arrive later and to go away sooner than formerly. Then he grew tired of being amused ; he regretted the time when he had all the talk to himself, and Fanchomick listened to him in mute delight. 'It will be no easy matter to get oneself obeyed by such a clever wife,' thought he ; 'she will always have the last word, and one can never be in the right with her.'

Then came another change. Fanchomick did not always take the feather from her hair or the pin from her



kerchief when she left Steven. While the aunt counted her cabbages the niece entertained the labourers, the tailor, even the curé himself, with jokes, repartees, and conversation, so playful and so witty, that she was the wonder of all the parish.

‘What herb has Fanchomick stepped on?’ said the young men, piqued at being beaten in brilliant talk. ‘Formerly she had not a word to throw to a dog, and now no one can ever have the last word when she is present.’

In the meantime Steven had learned the road to the Coudiaces’ farm, where the pretty Lisette listened to him with downcast eyes, not exactly answering to his proposals, but certainly not rejecting them.

Fanchomick wept in secret. Neither the feather in her hair or the liberty the pin secured her, consoled her for Steven’s coldness.

The leaves which were budding on the trees the first time the young girl saw the old woman at the fountain had faded under the August sun when the beggar-woman again appeared. This time it was not by the stream, but in the barn. Barbaik had been there the day before to



see if everything was ready for the harvest, and to her great disgust had found that the stones were everywhere displaced, and the floor so rough that the roller would jolt over the inequalities of the ground, and that a new threshing-floor must be made.<sup>1</sup> This was the last thing she wanted ; for though the neighbours would make the floor for her, and bring clay and water with them in their carts, yet she would have to provide food for all who came, besides broaching a cask of cider, and furnishing ribbons for the fêtes. The thought of all this outlay made Barbaik miserable. But how could she help it?

‘Go to the barn,’ said she to her niece. ‘Take a hammer with you, and try if you cannot make the stones go in. I will not send a man, because he would only do his best to displace them, to make sure of the fête.’

Barbaik was in the habit of scolding Fanchomick incessantly ; but nevertheless she trusted her. Poor old woman ! she little knew how many times a day her niece

<sup>1</sup> The inauguration of a new threshing-floor is the occasion of a great fête in Brittany.



sent her to count her cabbages, to the great delay of her work.

Fanchomick, out of breath, was leaning on her heavy hammer. The feather was not in her hair, but her heart needed no supernatural light to make her aware that oftentimes Steven was quite as much repelled as attracted by her wit.

'If the beggar had made me beautiful instead of clever, Steven never would have got tired of looking at me,' said she.

While she was speaking the old woman appeared before her, poorly clothed, and with her hair in disorder as usual. But Fanchomick now knew her magic power, and trembled before her, not daring to offer her black bread. From the depths of the pocket of a ragged petticoat the old woman drew a gold chain, worn with age and blackened with smoke, which she threw over the young girl's neck. 'Be beautiful!' said she, and disappeared.

Fanchomick had purposely not put either the feather in her hair or the pin in her kerchief till Steven was free to talk to her. But she could not wait an instant to



make sure that she had now the gift of beauty. Leaving her hammer on the floor of the barn, she ran to the neighbouring stream and bent over the clear water.

It was truly herself—Fanchomick, and no one else—but her eyes were larger without having lost any of their caressing sweetness; her black eyelashes rested on cheeks that were rosy without being red; her turn-up nose had become more finely cut; her teeth were much whiter than before, and her lips as red as two cherries. Her hair, which had escaped from her cap, lay in thick masses on her shoulders, soft and bright as silk. Fanchomick flushed with pleasure as she saw herself; but happy though she was while fastening up her hair, she put the feather in it, and sought for her pin; for she felt that she must employ all the power she had to keep—perhaps, alas! to regain—Steven's heart.

It was evening when she returned to the farm, and the men had gone home to their cottages. But Steven was not waiting at the old wall. He was hastening to the Coudiaces' farm, where Lisette's father had invited him to supper. He felt more confident than usual of his welcome, for Barbaik had made up her mind, and had



announced the new threshing-floor for the following Friday.

Lisette's pretty face beamed with pleasure on hearing this news.

'Will you not try to win the ribbons?' said she to him, in a low voice.

'If I get them they shall be for you,' said the gallant peasant, who had quite forgotten Fanchomick.

The next day they were very busy at the farm. Barbaik and her niece kneaded the bread and prepared the cakes. The flitches of bacon were unhooked from the chimney, eggs and butter in large quantities were gathered on the sideboard. The men brought clay, and drew water in barrels, which they placed round the barn. More than one of them, as he came and went, remarked with surprise Fanchomick's blushing face as she bent over the kneading-trough.

'I never expected the orphan would grow so pretty,' said the old priest. 'Her face seems lighted up as if by a miracle.'

Steven was not there. He had promised to stay at the Coudiaces' farm to fill the carts with the clay that



Lisette's father intended to take to Barbaik's threshing-floor.

It was midnight ; the labourers had long left the fields. The sheep were asleep, and the cows were in the sheds. No one could tell if anybody was awake at Barbaik's, for the shutters were carefully closed.

'The night wanderers need not see through the window when I count my skeins of yarn,' said the old miser. A suppressed murmur was, however, audible around the dwelling ; the sounds of wheels and of horses' feet broke the silence of the night. Numerous carts laden with clay, and barrels of water, were arranged outside the barn. The drivers tied up their horses and went to sleep on the grass. The knot of blue ribbons fastened to the stake in the middle of the barn was to belong by right to the first comer. They were all waiting for the church clock to strike midnight. The last stroke had scarcely sounded when Steven appeared leading the cart of the Coudiaces ; and he wore the ribbons in the button-hole of his large embroidered vest when Lisette arrived at the dawn of day to take part in the fête.

All the carts had deposited their loads. The clay and



water were mixed ; and the horses, decked with bright-coloured bows, had trod down the mortar which the men were levelling with their spades.

The women arrived in crowds from the surrounding farms and cottages. They were chiefly young girls, the mothers being generally detained at home by family duties. Lisette looked charming in her tight-fitting black jacket, her fair hair braided under her cap, and her gold cross hung round her neck on a violet-coloured velvet. She came, serene and confident, certain of being proclaimed by universal assent queen of the new barn, and happy in the thought of being seated in the chair and placed on the rustic throne by Steven's strong arm. For she knew well that for two miles round there was no girl that could compare with her in beauty.

'It is the blessed Virgin Mary who has made me so,' she replied, modestly, to the compliments paid to her. 'I cannot help it.'

Steven was at the head of the young men who were leading dame Barbaik's horses. He stopped them when Lisette entered the barn, and advanced towards her. But behind her suddenly appeared Fanchomick, her eyes



bright with a new light. Anger, tenderness, and jealousy, had heightened the poor forsaken girl's beauty in a strange way. She looked at Steven, and an irresistible attraction drew him towards her. Turning away from Lisette, who was smiling in her anticipated triumph, he raised Fanchomick in his arms, exclaiming, 'Fanchomick is beyond question the most beautiful!'

Nobody present was disposed to contradict him. Lisette herself beheld the charms of her rival with astonishment.

'What fairy has made her like this?' was all the girl said, and that to herself. 'A week ago Fanchomick was quite ugly.'

The sports began; the young men succeeded each other on the floor and wrestled with great spirit, each straining every nerve to overthrow his adversary. Twice Steven was victorious, and twice he brought the fruits of his victory to Fanchomick's feet.

The girl's triumph was complete. It surpassed, indeed, not only her hopes, but her desires.

Since the beggar-woman had thrown the gold chain on her neck, all the young men had followed her admiringly.



A few days, and it was not Steven alone who waited for her at the corner of the old wall. The farm was perfectly haunted by Fanchomick's suitors, and Barbaik counted on her fingers the offers that had been made her. She had shaken her head at the pretensions of many, but the old woman's greedy eyes sparkled with joy at the proposals of the miller of Guebrand. People said he was so rich that he could grind gold instead of corn in his mill, if he liked, and he only carried on his business because he was as avaricious as Barbaik herself. Still Fanchomick remained firm: neither the miller nor any of his rivals could obtain a look from her; all her heart belonged to Steven. But Steven was proud and poor, and held back; he would not court a woman who was sought by richer people than himself.

Fanchomick was so clever that nobody ever wearied of her company; and she was lovely enough to charm even babies in their cradles. But she was poor and an orphan, and she could not marry the man she loved best. 'If only I were rich!' sighed she at last, with tears in her eyes, one day when Steven had not been at the farm for a week. As she wept, her tears fell on her apron; and in



her distress she did not perceive her aunt, who had just entered.

‘ Bless me ! ’ exclaimed Barbaik sharply, ‘ what are you doing there, my beauty, weeping in the middle of the day, when there is work to do ? Cry at night, if you want to cry.’

As she spoke Barbaik seized her niece roughly by the arm, and forced her to rise. All at once a clear soft sound was heard ; pearls were rolling on the kitchen floor. As the tears flowed from the young girl’s eyes, fresh pearls fell on the ground, which the old woman, quite stupified, picked up as Fanchomick continued to weep.

At this moment Steven entered.

‘ She is weeping pearls ! ’ cried the mistress of the farm ; and with a greedy instinct she struck the poor child, until she made her sob more than ever. At every fresh tear a pearl of the purest water was picked up by Barbaik. But Steven sprang towards her.

‘ If a shower of pearls fell from her eyes at every tear she shed, I would not see her weep ! ’ exclaimed he, throwing his arms round Fanchomick. ‘ Look you, Dame Barbaik, I love her ; dare to strike her again ! ’



The miserly old woman's tone was changed.

'Only one tear more ! for her poor aunt who brought her up from her childhood !' cried she, in a supplicating voice. 'Selfish girl that you are ! If my tears were as valuable as yours, I would not cease weeping night or day.'

But Fanchomick paid no attention to her aunt, and left off crying. Her eyes were bright with a new meaning. She leaned her two hands on the young man's shoulder.

'Steven,' said she, 'for your sake I have desired to possess leisure, wit, beauty, and riches, yet you have often deserted me in spite of all the gifts with which I was endowed. But still I trust you. You cannot desire my riches, since you refuse to owe them to my tears. You say you love me ; I will be a good and faithful wife to you. To say I love you is needless. I have already proved it too only plainly.'

As she spoke she threw the pin and the chain at his feet—the wind had already carried away the feather—and looked in the face of her lover. The artificial beauty given by the enchanted chain gradually faded away from her, but a tender confidence animated the



light blue eyes, and candour shone on her innocent brow. The unnatural intelligence which had formerly prompted her words gave place to a grave and sweet simplicity. Her tears no longer changed to pearls ; but if they did fall, they left no bitterness behind them. Steven kissed her on her forehead and mouth.

‘ Mine,’ said he, ‘ in life and in death : without beauty, without wit, and without riches ; but mine you are, and mine only.’

Barbaik was beginning to cry.

‘ Be quiet, aunt,’ said Fanchomick, with a return of her old gaiety, ‘ or I will take away the pearls you have picked up.’


The old woman opened her hand to look at her treasure. But with the rest of the fairy’s gifts the pearls, too, had vanished ; a few drops of water alone moistened the stiff fingers of the old miser.

‘ We will work for you for nothing, aunt,’ both the lovers cried together.

‘ Well,’ muttered the old woman between her teeth, ‘ at any rate you won’t expect me to find my own nephew his meals, as if he were a day-labourer.’



*LEZ BREIS, THE BRETON DAVID,*

 **L**ITTLE Lez Breis lived with his mother. He was scarcely fifteen years old; his hands were weak, and his white forehead looked as if it would never support the weight of a helmet. But once, in the forest, he had met a knight returning from the war, and from that day the idea of becoming a soldier had taken possession of him. He wished to see the world, he said, and, sword in hand, to go and fight the Franks. His mother implored him to stay at home with her.

‘Thou art too young, my child,’ she said, ‘to fight yet; the first Frank thou meetest will kill thee; thy head will be pierced with the point of his lance, and I shall be left alone, with no son to comfort me.’



‘My sister will stay and comfort thee, dear mother,’ said the boy; ‘my sister Loiza, who is so good and sweet; she will soon hold the spindle at thy side and be thy companion, as a young girl should. But men are made for war; they must go far from home, and seek for glory. When I come back to thee, my mother, thou wilt be happy; then thou wilt kiss my wounds, and if they still bleed thy kisses will heal them.’ The mother embraced her son, but she was in no hurry to try the effect of her caresses upon his imagined wounds.

In vain do mothers hope to keep in the nest the young eaglet whose wings are grown; Lez Breis went away one morning, before day-break. He took the little brown colt, saddled him with his own hands, and fastened in front of the saddle the great sword of his father Konan, who had been killed long ago by his enemies in the country of the Franks. The sword was too heavy for the feeble hands of the lad, and too long to be suspended at his side, so Lez Breis armed himself with a dagger and rode away. He had gone without telling his mother of his intention; and he was already far away when she rose, and, looking out of her window down the long straight



high-road, wondered what could have raised such a cloud of dust so early in the morning.

‘No doubt a drove of cattle has passed by, on its way to the pasture,’ she thought.

No, poor mother, it was your own young son, who had gone away to fight against the Franks !

Time passed, and Lez Breis never came. For ten years he fought in distant countries, and his name had become celebrated everywhere ; but the fame of his exploits had never reached the solitary home where his mother lived. Thither he was now returning, to defend his native country against the Franks, who threatened it from all sides. He pressed his horse forward, for he was impatient to see his mother once more before he again went into battle. Arrived at the house, he was surprised to see briars and nettles growing in the courtyard, and the walls half ruined and covered with ivy. He knocked at the door with the hilt of his sword ; it was opened by a blind old woman, whose trembling hands held by the door-posts for support.

‘My good soul, can you give me shelter here for the night?’ asked Lez Breis, anxiously.



‘What we have shall be yours willingly, sir ; but it is not of the best. Our house has come down sadly since our child took his own way, and left us ten years ago.’

A young girl appeared on the threshold. She was not blind, like the old servant ; her eyes shone like diamonds under her eye-lashes, and her hair was fairer than the flax in her distaff. When she saw the knight, she began to weep, the tears running down her cheeks.

Lez Breis, surprised at her grief, said to her,

‘Tell me, young girl, what is it that makes you weep ?’

‘Sir knight, I have a brother who is just your age ; he went away ten years ago to follow the life of a soldier ; and whenever I see a man armed at all points I weep, as I think of my poor little brother.’

‘My pretty child, tell me, have you no other brothers, and is your mother alive ?’

‘Other brothers ! I have no other in all the world, and my poor mother is in heaven ; she died of grief when my brother went away to become a knight. Her bed is still here, and her arm-chair stands by the fireside ; and I, who



live here alone with my nurse, have nothing to console me but her holy cross.'

The knight sighed and covered his face with his hands ; the young girl approached him :—

'Have you also lost your mother ?' she asked.

'Yes,' said Lez Breis; 'I have indeed lost my mother, for I have killed her, and now she can pardon me only in Paradise. I am Lez Breis, the son of Konan, and thou, Loiza, art my sister.'

The young girl stood for a moment gazing at the knight, trying to recognise the features ; then she threw herself into his arms, put her hands round his neck and kissed him, weeping and laughing at the same time.

'God took thee away from us, my brother, but He has had pity on me, and has sent thee back,' cried she. Lez Breis, whose eyes had never before shed tears, wept also. But he was soon obliged to depart, and once more leave his sister Loiza. He gave her money to buy beautiful dresses, and to repair the ruined manor house.



‘It is money that I have won with my sword from the Franks,’ he said. ‘I was bringing it all to my mother.’

He promised to return very soon, and whispered in her ear as he left her,

‘If I should find a valiant and goodly knight, who has not yet given himself in marriage, I will bring him back with me to see my sister.’

Loiza blushed, and Lez Breis leapt into his saddle.

The King of the Franks was fighting on the frontiers, and pressing hard on the Breton nobles; every day some encounter took place; every day blood was shed. The king at last said to his knights,

‘The man who rids me of Lez Breis will render me a signal service; he is only twenty-five, but he fights so bravely that no one can vanquish him, and I suffer much from him in every battle.’

The knights looked at each other; no one was desirous of engaging Lez Breis in single combat, and with equal arms. By the king’s side there rode a giant, an African Moor, of dark complexion, with broad shoulders and flaming eyes. He was a head taller than all the



Frankish warriors, who were themselves taller than the Bretons. He alone came forward in answer to the summons.

‘If Lez Breis will fight with me, I engage to crush him with a single blow of my axe, to run him through the body with one thrust of my sword, to throw him from his horse at the first shock of my lance.’

‘My brave Moor has always served me faithfully,’ the king said ; ‘if he kills Lez Breis he shall be the greatest man at my court.’

The Moor drew himself up, and looked round on the knights with scornful eyes.

‘I am the greatest already,’ he said, with a sneer.

The young squire of Lez Breis ran trembling to his master, to report what had been said by the Moor.

‘Sir knight,’ he said, ‘the King’s Moor is about to challenge you to mortal combat.’

Lez Breis, who lay asleep fully armed, with his head on a stone, started up, and, seizing his sword,

‘Let us not leave to this miserable pagan the honour of challenging us,’ he said ; ‘let us be the first to call him out to battle.’



He would have set off at once, without waiting to taste food, but his squire held him back.

‘My lord,’ he said, ‘the Moor is not only a pagan, a cursed one, who denies the Holy Trinity, and blasphemes the name of Jesus Christ, but he is also an enchanter, well versed in witchcraft, and for this reason no one has ever been able to conquer him.’

‘I shall attack him in the name of the most Holy Trinity,’ said the knight, resisting the efforts of his squire, who strove to hold him back.

‘The Moor is hardened in the trade of arms, and his strength is mature ; whereas you, sir knight, are still young. You will be worn out in the struggle.’

‘The Lord of Heaven, whom this Moor has insulted, will send Saint Anne to protect me,’ replied the knight. ‘Saddle the bay horse and follow me ; but I charge thee not to approach the Moor ; what should I say to thy mother if I had to carry home to her thy dead body ?’

‘Where you go I will go,’ said the squire ; ‘but do not take the bay horse, nor the white horse ; take the black horse, for it has been well trained by the Moor himself, from whom you captured it in the last battle. When



you appear on the field the Moor will throw his cloak on the ground, but take care not to throw yours beside it ; give it to me, and let me hold it for you ; if your clothes touch his, all your strength will depart. Try to strike him as he sits in the saddle, but without causing him to fall from his horse ; for the moment his hands or his feet touch the ground, he will regain all the strength he has lost. May all the saints come to your aid, and enable you to conquer the pagan.'

When the two warriors entered the lists, they found all the Frankish knights assembled to witness the combat ; they were jealous of the Moor, but with a bitterer hatred they hated Lez Breis, the valiant defender of Brittany.

The Breton advanced to meet his adversary, making the sign of the cross three times in the air with the point of his lance, while the Moor trembled with rage and blasphemed the name of Jesus Christ. Before the impious words were well out of his mouth, Lez Breis fell upon him with all his strength ; his lance did not break, for it was consecrated ; before the Moor could reach him he had thrice repeated his blow ; but when they met the shock of the encounter was so great that the horses re-



coiled, and their riders were thrown on the ground. As the Moor touched the earth, he gained new strength ; but Lez Breis was armed with a strength greater even than his ; Saint Anne came to his aid, and he was no sooner on his feet again than he renewed the attack with redoubled force. The Moor grasped his sword more firmly ; rushing forward, his right arm was raised, and Lez Breis was on the point of perishing, when suddenly he discovered a small hole in the Moor's cuirass, and he thrust his lance through his enemy's breast. The Moor's sword fell harmlessly on the knight's helmet, the long arms waved in the air ; he staggered for a moment, and then fell with a resounding noise to the ground, like an oak-tree cut by the woodcutter's axe. Lez Breis, planting his foot on the Moor's chest, called on him to surrender, but there was no answer ; a black stream of blood issued from the lips. In this world he would never speak more.

‘ Die, thou miserable pagan ! ’ exclaimed Lez Breis, brandishing his sword ; ‘ shame on baptised Christians who allow themselves to be served and defended by infidels ! ’ Cutting off his enemy's head and slinging it to his



saddle, the white teeth stood out against the dark skin, and the eyes remained wide open, as in the agony of death. Little children cried aloud with terror as the knight galloped across the country bearing his frightful burden. His good sword was lying on the battle-field.

‘Never will I touch steel that is sullied with the blood of a pagan,’ said he, and left it there.

When Lez Breis had ridden away, the Frankish knights said to each other,

‘Now that the Moor is killed it will be *our* business to fight this insolent Breton ; the King will not again entrust his cause to infidels.’

No one lifted up the Moor’s body, or took the trouble to bury it. Perhaps far away, in his African home, some one wept for him ; but the Breton women rejoiced at his death.

‘Lez Breis has saved us. Lez Breis has killed our enemy,’ said they ; and came to meet him with songs and dances, just as the Jewish women came to meet the young David who had slain Goliath.

But the Breton David never lived to be a king. As he had fought that day he fought no more ; but went home



to the old ruined house, and to his sister Loiza. The soldier's life had been too hard for him. He fell sick immediately of a lingering disease, and within the year it was clear enough that, still quite a young man, he was passing away from this world.

He did not seem sorry ; and his last words were—he being a little wandering in his mind—‘ I have brought back the brown colt. Hang up the old sword; for I want to go home to my mother.’

And so he died.



*ERYPHINA'S CHILD.*

**I**N old times, when there were good kings as well as bad, mild-tempered and gentle women as well as sour and peevish ones, there lived a good king of Vannes, who had a daughter called Eryphina. She was as sweet as new milk fresh from the cow ; no one had ever seen her angry, and the worst people became better when they were near her. The king loved nothing in the world so much as his daughter Eryphina.

Unfortunately the princess was as beautiful as she was good, and the fame of her beauty had spread to all parts of the world. When she was only sixteen, Commore, Count of Cornouailles, sent an embassy to the King of Vannes, to demand of him his daughter in marriage.



‘Give me thy daughter,’ said Commore, ‘and though I am lord of the country where the black wheat grows, she shall never want for white bread and meat ; she shall be both rich and happy.’

The King of Vannes had doubts as to the happiness, whatever the riches might be. He knew that the count was a powerful prince, whose coffers were full of gold, and his land well stocked with cattle ; but he knew also that he was cruel to his subjects, that he was twenty years older than the little Eryphina, and that he had already had four wives, who all died without children and without its being known what had killed them. Besides, the prospect of such a marriage terrified Eryphina beyond measure. She wept so much that her father determined to keep her at home. So he said to the envoys of the count :

‘I thank your master for the honour which he has done us by wishing for our alliance ; but my daughter is still too young to think of marriage ; she desires to remain with me.’

The ambassadors withdrew in the greatest alarm, for they knew that this refusal would enrage their master



exceedingly. And, indeed, they had no sooner delivered their message and explained why they appeared before him without the princess, than the terrible sword of Commore sprang from the scabbard and the three envoys lay dead at his feet. Then he sent back this message to the king of the white country:—

‘Prepare thy arms and thy soldiers for battle, for I will make war against thee in all my might, unless thou give me thy daughter in marriage.’

The King of Vannes was a brave man, and these defiant words of Commore's did not increase his desire to give him his dear daughter—his Eryphina, who had never heard a harsh word since she was born. He called his subjects to arms, and in all parts of the country of Vannes the people made themselves ready for battle. They came forward willingly, unlike the people of Cornouailles, who never went to war except from fear of their lord. They all knew Eryphina, and every man was ready to give his life for her, while the women stayed at home and wept.

The soldiers of Commore had set out on their march, when a holy monk, named Veltas, who had often preached



both in the country of Vannes and the kingdom of Commore, came to seek Eryphina in her father's palace.

‘What is this?’ he said to her. ‘Shall a baptised Christian woman allow the men of two countries to kill each other for her sake ; to die, perhaps, in mortal sin, and to go straight to everlasting punishment? Even if it be true that Commore is wicked and cruel, of what importance is the happiness of one woman for a few years on earth, compared to the eternal welfare of so many Christian souls?’

Poor Eryphina trembled as she heard these stern words. Her fear of Commore was so great, that she grew pale at the very sound of his name. But the holy man, without heeding her, continued :

‘Here is a ring as white as milk. If you marry the Count of Cornouailles, and if the time should ever come when your life is in danger, it will immediately become as black as iron : then send it to the king your father, and he will come and deliver you. It is your fate to marry Commore. My daughter, fight no longer against the will of God.’

Eryphina dared not utter a word. She looked at the



ring shining on her finger—the fatal ring that was to warn her of unknown dangers at which she trembled beforehand, and then she knelt down before the holy monk, who accepted her mute submission and gave her his blessing :

‘May the great God of heaven and his only son Jesus Christ bless you in life, and after death receive you into Paradise,’ said Veltas, as he hastened away to stop the march of the soldiers of Commore.

The king at first tried to shake Eryphina’s resolution ; but the poor child had made a vow to Our Lady to offer herself up as a martyr in order to prevent the massacre of so many helpless souls : and the King of Vannes, who knew that he was less powerful than his enemy, was obliged to submit. His daughter must be sacrificed that his people might be saved. It is sometimes a hard thing to be a princess !

Commere was in high good humour when he arrived at the court of the King of Vannes. Satisfaction in having obtained the object of his desire, Eryphina’s great beauty and sweetness, the riches displayed during the marriage festivities, all combined to soften the ferocity of



his temper. Although he had seen thirty-five summers, he was still handsome and young-looking ; he was very tall, and so strong that he could lift an ox by his horns ; and his eyes were bright and fine, but full of fire. The king, who had conceived a very bad opinion of his future son-in-law, was agreeably surprised to find him so gay and handsome, and began to hope for the best.

After the marriage festival, which lasted three days, during which a hundred oxen and three hundred sheep were killed and distributed amongst the people, Commore took his young wife home. St. Veltas blessed her as she departed :—

‘ Paradise is yours,’ he said ; ‘ but you must first endure the sufferings of earth.’

Eryphina trembled, and raised her eyes to heaven. She had made her sacrifice, and regrets would come too late.

For some months all went well. The young countess often asked herself how Commore could have been called cruel. He was always kind to her ; and as he was very clever, he found a hundred ways of amusing his young wife, so that she hardly regretted the country she had



left. Every day some new pleasure awaited her, every day rich presents assured her of her husband's love. She quite lost the habit of looking at her ring, as she had done continually at first.

'What danger could threaten me while Commore is near me?' she said, forgetting that it was Commore himself of whom she had been formerly afraid. The people of the black country no longer knew their lord.

'He must be either ill or betwitched,' said his nearest attendants, 'for he has ceased to care for blood.' When any one was unfortunate enough to displease him and his eyes began to flash, a word from the countess would soften his wrath and procure for the culprit a milder punishment. In all the churches and monasteries of the black country the people offered up prayers to God for the long life of Eryphina.

Commore had given a large domain to St. Veltas on which to build a monastery, and the saint often came to visit the countess. When she spoke to him timidly of her happiness—for she was ashamed of the fears she had formerly expressed—he shook his head. 'We are born to suffer,' he said, with a grave look. And when he had



passed beyond the threshold of the castle he repeated to himself in Latin these words of the prophet : 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?' He had no faith in the new born mildness of Commore.

After some time the management of his affairs called the lord of the black country to a distance ; his wife wept and begged that she might go with him. 'No,' said Commore, 'amuse thyself in my absence ; thou wilt be absolute mistress of everything here, and I will soon return to thee.'

'I shall never leave the castle in thy absence,' said the countess ; 'how could I amuse myself when thou art far away?'

On his return the count found his wife looking pale from long confinement to the house ; but she blushed with pleasure and confusion as she met her husband, and showed him the work she held in her hand—a small cap of silk tissue, trimmed with silver lace.

'This,' she said, looking down, 'this will be for my little baby.'

Commore's eyes flashed angrily ; then shuddering, he left his wife without a word, without an embrace.



Now, for the first time, Eryphina saw in her lord's face the terrible look which made him so much feared. She threw herself trembling at the foot of her crucifix, and her eyes sought involuntarily for the silver ring, half hidden among the many costly rings with which her husband had loaded her fingers. She hardly knew it again ; it had become quite black !

Eryphina, who was naturally timid, stood petrified with terror at this unknown danger with which she was threatened. At the banquet which she had prepared for him, her husband sat silent and gloomy, and she was as pale as a white rose. When night came she could not sleep under her tapestry curtains. At midnight, as she lay awake, the hangings which covered the walls of the room shook as if blown by the night wind ; and, one by one, four pale shadows appeared gliding noiselessly to the foot of the bed where she lay.

Half dead with terror, she looked at them, but could not speak. The first, pale, with livid lips and long fair hair, said in a low voice,

‘ I am Dalmet, Commore's first wife.’



The second, who had marks of discoloration on her throat, said in a dull, muffled voice,

‘I am Finlas, the second wife of Commore.’

A bloody wound yawned on the bosom of the third ;

‘I am Haik,’ she said, ‘the third wife of Commore.’

The fourth, whose face bore marks of blows, said,

‘It is I, Mola, the count’s last wife, before thee.’

Then all four spoke together.

‘It is thy turn now,’ they said. ‘It was foretold him that his first child would kill him. We have all paid with our lives for this prophecy.’

Eryphina raised herself up in bed ; maternal instinct gave her courage. It was not herself alone she had to save, but the child that God might send her. Could she save it ? She murmured between her trembling lips,

‘I must fly—but how can I fly?’

‘Take this poison which killed me,’ said the pale shade with the livid lips.

‘Take this rope which strangled me,’ said she of the discoloured throat.

‘Take this dagger which stabbed me to the heart,’ said the form with the gaping wound.



'Take this stick which broke my skull,' said the fourth wife of Commore.

Eryphina rose, but she could not utter a word to her ghastly predecessors, who disappeared silently as they came. No sooner were they gone than the unhappy countess hastened to the window and let herself down from the tower by means of the rope which Finlas had given her. With the poison which had killed Dalmet she silenced the great dog that wandered about the courtyard. And when she started on her journey, in the dark night, to find her way back to her own country, she was armed with the dagger which had stabbed Haïk, and the stick with which Mola had been killed.

As she proceeded painfully on her way, stumbling over the stones on the road, catching hold of the bushes in the forest, and often striking herself against the trunks of trees, she heard overhead a rustling of wings, and by the first faint streaks of daylight she recognised her favourite falcon that she had brought with her from the kingdom of Vannes.

'Falcon, my good falcon,' she said to it, 'thou canst go faster than I to the place where my heart would be ;



carry this ring to my father, who will see that I am in danger, and will hasten to help me.' And cutting off with the dagger a lock of her hair, she fastened the ring round the neck of the falcon, which flew away as fast as if it understood the extremity of its mistress.

Meantime Commore had risen early, and had gone to seek for his wife. She was nowhere to be found ; and when he saw the rope tied to the window and his dog lying dead in the yard, his eyes flashed fire. Eryphina's women, and the sentinels at the gates, trembled as they looked at him. He called for his horses and rushed after the fugitive, stopping, however, from time to time to search for traces of the small feet. He dashed across the forest, and very soon came to a thicket from whence proceeded the cry of a child. He sprang from his horse with a bound, pushed aside the branches with his strong arm, and discovered Eryphina, pale and terrified, hiding in her arms a new-born infant, whose feeble cries she was in vain endeavouring to stifle. Commore's sword flashed for one moment in the air, and the next instant his wife's head rolled into the brushwood, dyeing the green leaves with her blood. Then shuddering, and never looking



behind him, he remounted and returned to the castle. He had forgotten the child. It lay safely concealed in the dead woman's arms.

It was a fête day when the falcon arrived at the white country. The subjects of the King of Vannes crowded all the squares and market-places, for St. Veltas had come to bless a new church. The king sat in the banquet-hall, with the monk by his side and all his great men around him. They feasted and made merry, yet always as became Christians in the presence of a holy priest. The falcon flew in at the window, and stationed itself on the table in front of the king.

‘What is this?’ said the king. ‘Here is the falcon that my daughter Eryphina took with her when she left me. Ah! holy father, you did well to prevent a war between our two countries; no one has suffered on her account, and Eryphina is happy.’

‘Do not be too sure of that,’ said the monk, as he examined the falcon. The faithful bird had brought back its mistress's ring; it was quite black—Eryphina was in mortal danger!

The king rose hurriedly. Not waiting for his attendants,



but ordering them to follow him, he mounted his horse and galloped off, St. Veltas following by his side on his accustomed mule. This creature, without seeming to hurry itself, neither lost breath nor looked fatigued; yet, fast as the good war-horse went, the priest's gentle mule kept pace beside it. The saint and the old soldier went their way together in search of their beloved Eryphina.

The king galloped across the forest without looking either to the right or to the left: St. Veltas said his prayers, and asked unceasingly for help from God. Suddenly both the horse and the mule stopped before a thicket, from which a plaintive cry escaped—a strange hoarse voice, which repeated without ceasing the same words:

‘Consecrated ground for me, and for my child the waters of baptism!’ With these mournful accents mingled the feeble cry of an infant.

The king trembled beneath his cuirass, but St. Veltas made his way into the thicket. There, at his feet, lay the body of Eryphina, the severed head uttering the words



that they had heard, the infant still clasped in the dead mother's arms.

The king, who had followed the monk into the thicket, was so overwhelmed with grief and rage that he could not utter a word, but the priest's voice sounded in the silence.

'Rise up, dead as thou art,' he cried, 'and come to the castle of the count thy husband, that thou mayest convict and punish him for his crime.'

As he spoke Eryphina rose ; the pale head returned to its place. She took her child in her arms, and went along with the monk and the king.

The castle of Commore was closed and well guarded with soldiers ; the count himself was on the ramparts, disguised, as if he feared discovery, in the dress and arms of a simple squire, with the vizor of his helmet lowered. As the travellers approached the gates St. Veltas called to the sentinels in a loud voice,

'I demand to see the count.' But no one answered, for so their master had given orders. The soldiers continued their rounds, and the pretended squire soon found



himself face to face with his enemies. Deep ditches and high walls sheltered him from the arm of the avenger, and he felt himself safe from discovery behind his vizor, but he could not take his terrified eyes away from the sight which met them—the dead Eryphina walking with her living son in her arms. Suddenly the child slipped down from her breast. To the amazement of all, the feeble infant, two hours old, stood upright on its feet, and, pointing an accusing finger to its father,

‘Behold him!’ it said distinctly in a soft strange voice; then, stretching out its small hand, picked up from the ground a handful of sand and threw it against the ramparts. In an instant the walls gave way, the gates flew open, the chains were broken, and the towers, shaken to their foundations, fell to the ground, burying everyone that was within in their ruins.

‘Alas! the innocent have perished for the guilty,’ exclaimed the good King of Vannes.

But St. Veltas knelt down before the pile of ruins, and, making the sign of the cross, said,

‘God has executed justice on the murderer, and taken the innocent to His eternal arms. Look there!’



He pointed to Eryphina, who lay stretched on the ground—a corpse, only a corpse, once more. But there was a smile upon the quiet mouth, and the hands, as if there had been life in them still, held fast her babe.

‘God is above all ; we do not understand His ways,’ said the good priest. Let us bury the dead and baptise the living.’ And lifting up the child, now again helpless as a new-born babe, he placed it in its grandfather’s arms.



*JEANDRIN THE GOBLIN.*

**T**HERE were great rejoicings at the farm of St. Amand. Full cans of cider went round the table, and many a cut was made in the hard cake. The meal was nearly ended, but the appetites of the guests, like their mirth, seemed without end. The farmer's son had brought home to his father's house the new wife whom he had found in the Pays<sup>1</sup> de France, whither he had several times gone to sell the oxen. From their first meeting he had fallen so deeply in love with her that he never rested night or day till he obtained her hand. Her name was Perrine.

<sup>1</sup> The Norman peasants so designate the environs of Paris, the ancient Isle of France.



She was tall and slender, and her blue eyes seemed so sweet to her young husband that he was constantly coming back to look at them. His old mother also looked at them, but with involuntary pain and apprehension. The farmer's wife had not been farther from home than her own village. She had never even accompanied her husband as far as Vire, where he went once a year for the great fair. But she had nevertheless acquired experience of life and character, and her daughter-in-law's face and expression had chilled her from the first moment when the girl had appeared smiling on the threshold of the farm. No one observed the effort with which the old woman kissed the new comer when her husband helped her down from the cart. Nor did anyone see the anger which for a minute rendered the face of the bride cold and hard as steel when the mother exclaimed, 'Welcome are the young arms that come to share in the household work! Welcome the skilful hands that will spin the flax for our linen!

The young damsel of the Pays de France had no intention of becoming the servant of her husband's parents.

Laughter and songs were resounding beneath the



smoke-dried rafters of the farm, when the door was pushed softly open and a brown dog appeared on the threshold. He had a rough coat and red eyes, and was not at all a handsome dog, though he had a look of great intelligence and gentleness. He advanced towards the group of singers with the confidence of a child of the house. The mistress stretched out her hand to caress him. Her son, who was leaning over his wife and whispering soft words in her ear, suddenly turned round. 'Ah ! here is Jeandrin,' he exclaimed ; ' How do you do, Jeandrin ? ' and he drew the head of the animal towards his young wife, who retreated with affected terror. ' I do not like dogs,' said she, ' and above all strange dogs frighten me.'

' But Jeandrin is not strange, he is my dog,' insisted her husband. ' He came to the farm long ago, of his own accord, from nobody knows where, and we have been friends ever since. " Love me love my dog ; " is it not so, Jeandrin ? '

The young farmer bent over his favorite and caressed him, for he had been a little vexed by his wife's behaviour. But Jeandrin's eyes looked angry, and for



the first time in his life he had a vicious expression. Pierre Heurtesant left off coaxing his wife and loosened the dog's collar and called to him, 'Come Jeandrin and have some dinner!' and with one sweep of his tongue the dog swallowed the contents of the dish of meat that was still on the table. The bride smiled scornfully.

'Is it the custom here for dogs to eat with Christians?' asked she.

'Jeandrin is almost a Christain,' said her husband, smiling; 'since he came to us six years ago on a snowy December night we have not lost an ox, and the cows give milk winter as well as summer. No one has been ill, and prosperity has accompanied me, even to the Pays de France, where I met you.'

Perriné began to laugh. She had been married for a month, and loved her husband as much as she could love anyone.

No one present appeared surprised at the liberty taken by Jeandrin, or ventured to disturb him now that he was satisfied and lying stretched at his full length before the fire.



The young wife wanted to warm her little hands, having washed them after serving the guests, and particularly the poor ones, in accordance with the pious custom at feasts in Brittany, and even Normandy. Her husband, who followed her everywhere, passed his hands gently over Jeandrin's back, who, half awakened, made a little room beside the fire for Perriné; but when she seemed to encroach on his domain, the dog growled. The old woman came to the chimney corner.

'Jeandrin is tired,' said she, 'and he must be allowed to sleep.'

Perriné coloured deeply. She made no answer, but from that day she entertained a strong aversion to the animal that had already drawn upon her the disapprobation of both her mother-in-law and of her husband.

'By-and-bye I will find out how to get rid of that detestable creature,' thought she, before she went to sleep. But the wind whistling between the open beams and the rats that ran about the floor of her room troubled her so much that she forgot Jeandrin for a time. She had always lived in towns, and the mysterious night noises of the country filled her with terror. In the morning she



woke wearied with the disturbed night she had passed, and came down embarrassed at finding herself the last at the family meal. The barking of a dog was heard in the distance.

‘Jeandrin has brought the cows from the upper meadows and is taking them to the lower field,’ said the farmer’s wife to her husband, as if she had been speaking of a faithful and intelligent servant.

The dog again made his appearance panting, with his tongue hanging out, and, as he had done the day before, he looked on the table for his meal. The farmer handed him his plate.

Perriné drew back her chair and put up both her hands, as if to protect herself from the dog. Her father-in-law laughed, as he said, in the tone of authority of a man accustomed to be obeyed, ‘You must get used to Jeandrin.’

The young wife, who was an only daughter and accustomed to be petted, gave no answer but an expressive pout ; and when, with her sleeves tucked up, she helped to wash the breakfast-things, she scornfully pushed away the plate that Jeandrin had used.



‘I am not going to wash the dog’s plate,’ muttered she between her teeth.

The mother saw it all, but neither spoke nor laughed, as her husband had done. She augured no good for her son’s happiness from the tone and manner of the bride.

The wedding festivities were over, and everybody had to return to work. Perriné was intelligent and clever. Whenever she put her hand to household affairs they prospered. Her husband was often absent. He had returned to the Pays de France in charge of a troop of oxen, and his wife remained at the farm. When he came home after his long journey he found his mother ill and out of spirits; but Perriné was laughing and singing. She went to and fro in the house, ordering the servants in a hard dry voice, and with much more imperiousness of tone than they had been accustomed to from the old mistress; they obeyed, however, and the farmer was delighted with his daughter-in-law and her good management.

‘You have brought us a fairy from that distant region,’ said he to his son. ‘She does as she likes, and no one



dares to oppose her; even old Placide himself, who always growls, is pleased when she speaks to him.' .

'And Jeandrin?' asked the young man smiling, and happy to hear the praises of his wife. The old man's brow grew clouded.

'Jeandrin is not good,' answered he, in a low voice.

'Has he been at his tricks?' asked Pierre. 'Has he tied the cows by the tail?'

'If it was only that!' And the old man smiled in spite of himself at the recollection of the astonishment of his daughter-in-law, when she had gone early in the morning to the cow-house to milk the cows, and had found the best milch cows lowing piteously and tied by their tails to their racks. 'He had milked them all in the night,' continued the old man, 'and thrown the milk in the gutter. He had mixed water with the cheese-curdle stuff,<sup>1</sup> and your mother for once lost patience when she found all her fowls shut up far away from their chickens.'

Pierre shook his head gravely.

'He must have been very wicked,' said he; and without adding more, he determined to find out the cause of

<sup>1</sup> The country name for the liquor used to curdle the milk.



Jeandrin's misconduct. Such heaps of offences to be laid upon one poor dog !

Perriné had appeared greatly delighted by the return of her husband. But when she saw him occupied about the health of his mother, and ready to caress the detested dog, and attentively watching his movements, a spirit of restlessness took possession of her. She went to and fro without any object, and persisted in following her father-in-law everywhere ; even when Pierre wanted her to stay in the house, or go with him to the fields.

The mistress shook her head sadly, but she was ill, and had no spirit for a contest. Her husband now saw everything with Perriné's eyes, and the poor mother perceived with a great pang that when this damsel of the Pays de France set her foot on the threshold, she had destroyed the peace as well as the good fortune of the house. She would sometimes take Pierre's head between her hands as she used to do when he was little, and kiss him in silence. The young man was also sorrowful. All the remedies of the old wives of the parish did not succeed in restoring his mother to health ; and without



being exactly aware of it, he felt that his dreams of happiness were vanishing away.

Meanwhile he had in vain watched his wife ; he could discover no trace of animosity towards Jeandrin. The dog continued sullen when in the house (out of doors he always recovered his gaiety), yet he had his usual place by the fireside. Perriné no longer shrugged her shoulders when the head of the animal appeared on the table, and he possessed himself without ceremony of the best piece on the dish. And it was apparently Jeandrin who was always in the wrong, for he growled and showed his teeth whenever the young wife passed near him.

‘The dog dislikes you very much,’ said Pierre ; ‘ what have you done to him ? ’

Perriné smiled disdainfully, and only answered, ‘ He is jealous. He thinks you like me better than him.’

But this plausible explanation was not enough for the young man, who, like his mother and all the people about the farm, was convinced that a good spirit lived within the ill-favoured form of the faithful, clever old dog.

The mistress grew weaker and weaker every day. If



Pierre had consulted his wife on the cause of her illness and melancholy, she would perhaps have attributed them also to jealousy. Alas ! there was no need to tell the son that the young wife whom he had brought from so far was not kind to the old mother. He saw it plain enough. But Norman people are silent and reserved ; and he did not reproach his wife, but redoubled his attentions to his mother, trying to be both daughter and son to her in one.

The farmer could not, or would not, see that his wife was dying. It was the time of the great fair, and he had to sell and buy oxen. He saddled his pony, and set out with two men to drive them to the market. Jeandrin was generally his companion on his distant expeditions ; but this time, when at the last minute the dog was called, he answered neither to whistle or voice ; and they were obliged to set out without him. The men remarked to each other, ' We are going to have some mischance, and that is why Jeandrin will not come.'

The farmer had been gone twelve days, and his wife had now taken completely to her bed. For the first



time since the birth of her son—the last of her children, and the only one that remained to her—she ceased to be the first to rise, the most active to work, the readiest to bear the burdens of the day. Pierre was beside her. He had summoned the priest, and the dying woman had received the communion. She had fallen back exhausted on her pillows, whispering to her son the solemn words of her last adieu. ‘Be kind to your father,’ said she. ‘He will grieve deeply when he returns, and does not find me here. Also be good to Jeandrin ; he is not happy at present.’ And then lowering her voice again, as if she feared even now to wound her son : ‘Look after your wife, and may God help you.’

Pierre understood, but did not reply. He felt in his heart a cold fear that Perriné would not console him for the loss of his mother, as Rebecca consoled Isaac in the plains of Canaan for the loss of Sarah.

Perriné was now mistress and queen in the kitchen, the dairy, the cow-house, the poultry-yard. Her mother-in-law had never opposed her, never countermanded one of her orders ; but the sweet sad face of the old mistress, her silent activity, and her established authority, had



been displeasing to the young wife. The servants obeyed Perriné without a reply, but it was always to their old mistress that they had gone for orders. Now she was no longer amongst them, and the dawn of a new day had begun.

Pierre was absorbed in his grief; twice he had gone down to the kitchen for some cordial needed for the invalid. He had never asked Perriné to come into the sick room, and she had not offered her services; but employed herself in inaugurating her reign in the house.

It was an autumn evening, and the serving-men were coming in one after the other, forced by the young mistress to rub their feet on the mat at the door before crossing the threshold, and grumbling amongst themselves at the whims of this town girl, so different from their country ways. Jeandrin slipped in with them, and they drew back to let him pass. The dog had been running all day, and his rough coat was covered with mud. His large paws left their traces on the newly-washed floor of the kitchen; but Jeandrin, no way disturbed by that, made straight for the fireside. The soup was cooking slowly in the large kettle over a clear fire,



and Pierre's supper was waiting for him under a plate on the hearth.

Perriné was a good housekeeper, and attended to her husband's needs. Jeandrin pushed over the plate with his paw, and the delicate morsel reserved for the master was swallowed by the dog before the young woman had time to interfere. It was too much ! Perriné seized the tongs that had fallen by chance on the hearth, and pressed Jeandrin's nose between the two red-hot irons. 'I will punish you ! you wicked dog !' cried she.

Jeandrin freed himself in a moment. The creature seemed suddenly to become larger ; he raised his head as if he had not felt the burn, and walked backwards towards the door, his look fixed on the enemy. The men, petrified by superstitious fear, remained in their places without moving. Jeandrin pushed open the half-closed door, and his gleaming eyes shot a last look of anger at Perriné. As he crossed the threshold he uttered a long howl. Then the heavy door closed on him, and at the same moment Pierre rushed into the room, exclaiming, 'My mother is dead !'

When the labourers went out at daybreak the next



morning, they were surprised to see the mark of a horse's hoof deeply impressed on the door-stone. 'We have always declared that Jeandrin was not a dog like other dogs,' said they, as they went to their work. 'He must have been a goblin—a good goblin—who came to the farm for the love of the dear old mistress who is gone. We shall never see either of them more.'

They never did. Neither then nor at any other time was the quaint figure of kind Jeandrin seen lying at the hearth, or trotting about the farm. His body was never found, and by the shape of the horse's hoof left on the road they conjectured that the goblin, as goblins do, had suddenly changed his shape before he went away, to bring to some other household the prosperity which was no longer in this one. For all the good luck of the farm departed with Jeandrin. When the farmer returned, he had not sold his oxen. For the first time in his life his pony had stumbled, fallen, and broken its knees. And when he entered, and heard his wife was dead, he too fell down, broken-hearted. Gentleness and harmony ceased with the old mother's life. Pierre's journeys from home became more and more frequent. He fled from



Perriné's hard, unloving rule. By way of consolation the farmer drank all the brandy he could get from his cider. Every time he crossed the door-stone he trembled at sight of the mysterious hoof-prints, which no efforts succeeded in removing from the road.

'Jeandrin and good fortune came with the old wife and goodness,' said he, 'and now both have gone away together. 'I'll go too—the sooner the better.' So one day he laid him down and died.



*THE WONDERFUL TURKEY.*

**I**T was almost the end of the Carnival. All the good housewives in Caumont had laid in a good store of flour and eggs for pancakes, and the children were going about the streets singing the accustomed rhyme—

Shrove Tuesday, Shrove Tuesday,  
Come home, come home;  
We are going to make pancakes,  
And you shall have some.

‘It was on this day that Mother Sandret used to sell so dear the eggs that she had kept all winter,’ said a woman who was standing at the door of her cottage. ‘It was an unknown man who bought—a fairy,’ she said.



‘I wish he would come to me—I wish something would happen to us to-night!’

‘Hush!’ said a little girl, pulling her by the skirt, with her pretty face full of terror. ‘Hush, mother, or the fairies will hear. Didn’t Mother Sandret one night see a man all in white, who took her eggs and threw them into the dust-basket, and yet in the morning not a single one was broken?’

‘I have heard your grandmother say so,’ answered Rosalie Lys, lowering her voice. ‘But it is getting dark; perhaps we had better not talk of these things. Your father will soon be coming home from work; the poor man will be very tired, and sad too—for he knows that he will find nothing ready at home for Shrove Tuesday. Oh I wish he might meet a fairy, after all.’

‘Ah, mother, there will be pancakes!’ cried the little girl. ‘The hens have laid on purpose.’

‘And they have done well,’ muttered the mother, ‘for there is nothing either in the salting-tub or the cupboard.’

‘Never mind; the hens have laid,’ repeated the child.

It was late; the tired-out workmen were returning from



their labours ; the day had ended ; the children had gone to bed early in order to hasten the coming of this Shrove Tuesday, for which they had waited so long. Marin Lys stood chatting with his fellow-workman, Pierre Doucet, who had been digging with him all day in the trench.

‘Are you going to work to-morrow?’ asked Marin.

‘No, no,’ said Pierre ; ‘Shrove Tuesday comes only once a year, and I mean to enjoy myself a little at the Broom-Bough.’<sup>1</sup> My wife and the children may do as they can at home.’

‘I must finish the trench all alone, then,’ sighed Marin. ‘My wife and children cannot do without bread, and we have got on so badly this last year that we are never a day ahead.’

‘Women can make pancakes with water,’ sneered Pierre, and then the two men parted.

Marin walked on without looking round him. His feet, accustomed to the road, followed its windings without his needing to trouble himself to avoid the cart-ruts, or pools of water, or loose stones ; a little new moon cast on his steps a faint light ; but the tired workman

<sup>1</sup> A common public-house sign in some parts of Normandy.



looked forward impatiently to the moment when he should first catch sight of the feeble glimmer of the candle burning in his cottage.

On emerging from a path that was bordered by great oaks and thick underwood, he suddenly stopped at a little open glade formed by the meeting of four roads. Wonderful sight ! A bright light dazzled his eyes. He saw upon the ground a great white cloth. At each of its four corners a torch was burning ; in the middle, sitting like a tailor, with his legs crossed, was a man, clothed in a curious dress, counting gold from a heap that lay before him. An enormous heap it was ! The man plunged and re-plunged his hands into it, causing a metallic ring that echoed in the peasant's unaccustomed ears like strange music.

Marin did not dare to stir. It was in vain that he tried to move his feet ; in order to get home he must cross the glade, but the sight of the gold fascinated him. The mysterious stranger had never raised his eyes ; but presently, as he made a pile of the sparkling golden pieces, he muttered these words in a hollow whisper—  
'Take some, but leave some.'



Marin had not dreamt at first of getting possession of any of the treasure for himself, but now the thought of his wife and children, and of the joy that he should cause by bringing home ever so small a portion of this pile of gold, was too much for him. He stretched out his hand and took one piece ; only one—but it was more money than he had ever possessed in his life. Then, ill at ease, not knowing whether he had done right or wrong, he bounded over the white cloth, and took to his heels without ever looking behind him.

He ran in the direction of his own cottage, but after a little his step began to get slower ; he grew more and more uneasy, and at last he stopped altogether. ‘It is devil’s money,’ he said, looking at the piece of gold in his hand, and expecting to see it changed into a dry leaf. But, no ! the gold still sparkled before his eyes, and it bore the king’s stamp. ‘At any rate I have not earned this money, and I don’t know where it has come from,’ the honest peasant went on. ‘Perhaps it may bring trouble on my wife and children !’ Poor Marin sighed bitterly. He thought of the misfortunes that overwhelmed him—his wife ill, his cow dead, his children sickly : he



made the sign of the cross. 'All that is God's will,' he said, 'but this money burns my fingers.' And all at once, turning round as if he was afraid of his resolution giving way, he rapidly retraced his steps, and soon came once more to the little glade. The stranger was still there, counting his treasure. Marin came forward without hesitation, and placed his piece of gold beside the rest. The man lifted up his eyes no more than he had done before, but only said in the same sepulchral voice—'Thou hast done wisely. Wealth ill-acquired profits nobody.' And then Marin never stood still again till he reached the threshold of his own house.

Pierre, meanwhile, had been going his way; he had not hurried himself, although he was tired. His wife was a scold, his children always dirty and frightened, for his selfishness and his frequent visits to the public-house had borne their natural fruits. Pierre and Seraphine were as poor as Marin and Rosalie, but they did not, like Marin and Rosalie, love one another, nor trust, as they did, in the God who helps the poor and unfortunate.

The moon was hidden by clouds, and the muddy road was so impassable, that Pierre thought he would



climb over the fence that separated it from the fields. Everything was quite quiet; the few houses scattered amidst the meadows were far off. As Pierre put his foot on one of the wooden bars of the fence, he heard in the hedge close to him the convulsive movements of some living creature.

‘Who is there?’ he cried in a low voice, rather husky with fear.

There came no answer, except a sound as of the wings of a wounded animal beating against some obstacle; and then Pierre, stretching out his hand, caught hold of the feathers of a large bird which had got imprisoned amidst the branches of a hazel-tree.

‘Oh, it’s a turkey!’ cried he. ‘How has it got here, so far from home? It is my good luck that sends it in my way for Shrove Tuesday.’ And without a moment’s hesitation, he seized the bird, and stuffed it into the bag which he carried on his shoulder. ‘Suppose I take it to Mother Celestine?’ he said to himself, as he walked on. ‘She would make it into a feast for me all by myself.’ But the thought that the landlady at the public-house might perhaps recognise the turkey, which



no doubt belonged to some of the neighbours, made him rather afraid of indulging in this selfish plan. 'My wife and the children will have to content themselves with the skin and bones,' he said presently to himself, as he went on towards the poor dilapidated cottage that sheltered Seraphine and his little ones.

As the workman came into his hut, the screams of the children, who were disputing with one another, ceased suddenly, for they were afraid of their father's anger. The younger ones crouched in the chimney-corner; the elder threw themselves down upon the heap of dried leaves which served for their bed, and pretended to be asleep. Seraphine, with her dress all in rags, her eyes red, and her face still bruised from a blow that her husband had given her the day before, flung a handful of brushwood upon the fire, and as the flame sprang up from it through the smoke she saw the full bag which Pierre had let down upon the ground.

The woman laid her hand upon it with an eager look. 'You have bought us some bread?' she said joyfully.

'Better than that,' cried Pierre, laughing; 'I have found



a turkey, which you must cook for my Shrove Tuesday's dinner.'

'Stolen !' all at once cried a clear voice.

The husband and wife stared at one another. Pierre thought he had not heard aright ; Seraphine had turned white.

'Where did you find the turkey ?' she asked.

'In a hedge,' said Pierre, 'where there was neither man nor house.'

'And where you will return, and take me back again,' interrupted the voice—shrill and bird-like, but quite distinct.

Seraphine fell upon her knees beside the bag : it was the turkey that had spoken ! Pierre remained motionless, confounded and terrified, with the perspiration standing in drops upon his forehead.

'Take me upon your shoulder,' said the voice again.

Tired as he was, the terrified workman obeyed. Without stopping to sit down, or eat a morsel of bread, or drink a glass of cider, he threw the bag upon his shoulder, and went along the road that he had already traversed an hour before.



The bag was light at first, but at each step he took Pierre felt the burden grow heavier. 'I can go on no longer,' he said presently to himself; 'I am too tired.' And then he broke into an exclamation of anger; 'Cursed turkey!' cried he.

The sack grew heavier and heavier upon his shoulders. At the beginning of his walk the weight of it had scarcely been ten pounds, but before he had carried it for half an hour it seemed to be a hundred weight, and with every step it grew heavier and heavier. When at length he stood still to take breath, the voice, which froze the blood in his veins, instantly exclaimed 'Go on!' and Pierre went on his way again, without daring even to murmur, for each complaint and each oath he uttered increased the burden that was weighing him down.

Pierre's steps insensibly grew slower ; it was with difficulty, and only by the greatest effort, that he continued to go forward at all. The unhappy man thought no more now of the Broom-Bough, of Shrove Tuesday, or of the gay companions with whom he had hoped to spend the night, while his wife and children starved at home ; he only thought of his fatigue, of his terror, of the bad luck



(this was the name he gave to his theft) that had put the turkey in his way : he felt his knees tottering, he panted for breath, he was bathed in perspiration, his trembling hands leant for support against the trees as he passed. At last he fell, overwhelmed by his burden ; he had fainted on the road, and in the dark night he lay dying of fatigue and fear.

It was cold ; the icy wind whistled through the bare branches, and the unhappy man would have expired without help if Marin had not chanced to pass that way. Finding his comrade lying on the ground, he lifted him upon his shoulders, and carried him as far as the first cottage, charity giving to one brave peasant that strength which the other had lost through remorse and fear. When the wretched man came to his senses he opened his eyes wildly.

‘The turkey !’ murmured he.

Nobody understood what he meant—and he confessed nothing. Perhaps he tried himself to believe that it had all been a dream, as wonderful dreams do happen sometimes on the eve of Shrove Tuesday. But when he went



home he stormed at his family, and insisted that they too should hold their tongues.

Pierre never became either a good husband or a good father. His family turned out ill, and soon left him. But the peasant had learnt at least one wholesome lesson: however great might be his distress, however much he might be tempted by the Broom-Bough, he never again laid a finger on the property of other people. If he ever longed to do so he always heard the formidable words ringing in his ears 'Turkey!' 'Stolen!' 'Go on! go on!'



*THE NIGHT WASHERWOMEN.*

**T**ELL you, Rire, young girls ought not to go to fêtes,' said a woman whose voice and features were sharpened by severe pain. She lay in her bed, with its large-flowered Indian curtains drawn round her, suffering from an illness that seemed likely to carry her to her grave. Her daughter, who was sewing near the window, was large, fair, and young, with open blue eyes and white teeth. She answered quite naturally to the name of Rire (Laughter), by which she was known everywhere instead of by her baptismal name of Zephirine. She was almost always laughing, but just now a dark cloud overshadowed her brow. She was out of humour, and the shrug of her shoulders betrayed her extreme dissatisfaction with something or other.



‘The fête of La Saint Loup at Crèvecœur is the best for ten miles round. I do not see why I should not go like other people. If young girls do not go to fêtes, there will soon be no fêtes at all.’

The mother was rather deaf, and could not hear her daughter’s words, but she had no difficulty in interpreting her gestures.

‘You cannot go to the St. Loup,’ said she, ‘because I am ill, and a girl does not go to a fête without her mother.’

This reflection rather shook Rire’s confidence ; she hesitated, but soon answered,

‘If my godfather will take me, may I not go?’

The invalid sighed ; she was tired, and wanted to go to sleep. She had brought up her daughter badly, and knew very well that if Rire was disappointed she would bang the doors, rattle the crockery, let her scissors fall, and not permit her poor mother a minute’s rest.

‘If your godfather would take charge of such a mad-cap,’ sighed she.

‘He would like nothing better;’ and Rire started off her chair with such eagerness, that she upset it, and kissed



her mother in high good humour, by way of gratitude. 'He always says that the fêtes are not so pretty as they were when he was young, but he never misses one notwithstanding. I will go to the farm at supper-time this evening, and ask him to take me on his pony,' said the happy girl. And, laughing and talking, she jumped about the room, making the windows vibrate with every step, knocking her feet on the rough tile flooring, and never perceiving that her mother turned pale and put her hand on her heart with an expression of pain. And then Rire, glad to have gained her victory, and delighted with the prospect of the promised pleasure, went away to the garden, singing merrily.

The invalid had lost all thought of the present time; half insensible from pain, she was unconsciously recalling the days when her husband was living and she was happy, strong, and good-looking, and when her sons were not with the army, and her Rire was quite a little girl from whom nobody had required more than to be healthy and merry. The poor mother sighed bitterly. She did not blame her daughter; on the contrary, if anyone made the least allusion to Rire's excessive love of pleasure, she



would eagerly defend her. 'Youth must pass away,' she would say. But she felt sad and lonely when her child left her all day long to go away and amuse herself. According to the custom of Normandy mothers, she had devoted herself entirely to her children; but she had not made them comprehend that self-denial ought to awaken self-denial, and that parents as well as children equally owe obedience to a Divine Master. Rire went to church on Sunday, but she used to think all the time of the fête that would follow the mass, of her bonnet-ribbons, or her shoe-buckles, and never heard the priest's voice. All the young folks would gather round Rire; but the parents would shake their heads and say, 'She is a very pretty girl, but she will not make a good woman; she is too giddy.' Many mothers sighed as they spoke thus; for some of their daughters were not more steady, and very few as handsome as Rire.

It was the morning of the St. Loup fête, and the narrow roads that led to the town of Crèvecoeur, generally so quiet and lonely, were crowded with peasants dressed in their best, with their red umbrellas in their hands, carefully picking their steps through the cart-ruts and the



pools of water. Notwithstanding the long drought, mud reigned supreme in each deep and shady path, which often became the bed of a little stream. The women pressed against the big hedges to avoid being splashed by the passing horses, carrying, perhaps, a rich grazier and his wife, or a cattle-dealer and his daughter, whose large cap, trimmed with lace and ribbons, rose above the broad-brimmed hat and embroidered blouse of her companion. Everybody was going to the fête, and nobody was happier than Rire. She had milked the cow, fed the fowls, prepared her mother's soup: everything that she thought her duty to do, she had done. But no more. Helping her mother for love did not enter her mind.

At every plunge of the animal they rode, she threw her arms round the stout waist of her godfather, laughing at her own alarm, and chattering incessantly. The old farmer paid no more attention to her merry talk than to the songs of the birds in the hedges. But Rire chattered on just as much as ever.

'Were you not frightened last night, godfather, when Tranquille came to say that the fairy-bulls had come into the upper field?'



This time the old man turned round his face, softened by a smile.

‘Tranquille paid for the fright he gave me,’ said he, calmly. ‘He made acquaintance with the handle of my whip.’

‘But, godfather,’ insisted Rire, ‘if he really saw the bulls?’

The farmer laughed aloud as he said, ‘There is not a single ear broken in all the field. Mine is the finest wheat in the whole country—more than eighty bushels an acre, I will answer for it.’

‘Tranquille does not drink,’ eagerly exclaimed Rire; ‘his eyes could not deceive him.’

The farmer looked at the young girl.

‘You really believe Tranquille?’ said he.

Rire coloured, but did not lower her eyes.

‘He has told me more than ten times over that he saw the bulls,’ replied she in a low voice.

‘Where have you seen him to give him the opportunity of telling you this fact so many times?’ asked her godfather.



‘Just now, after mass,’ answered Rire, a little confused.

‘So he stopped under the yew-tree in the churchyard, to repeat his nonsense to you instead of going to church?’ enquired the farmer.

Rire gave a nod of assent.

Her godfather looked thoughtfully as he said slowly, ‘I do not regret having struck him—no. It will teach him to think before he speaks. But I do not say he has not seen the bulls. They are fairy bulls. My late father also saw them once in the same place. Only if Tranquille had had as much sense as he, he would have thrown his stick after the last beast, and all the band would have been off as fast as possible, without so much as an ear of corn bending its head. That was my late father’s way ; no noise, no fuss, did he make.’

While the old man meditated thus upon the merits of his father, who had been in his grave more than thirty years, Rire repeated in a low tone, ‘If Tranquille saw the bulls, they must have been there for a certainty.’

They were approaching Crèvecœur, and every minute the crowd grew thicker. The young men sang louder ;



the girls, nearly all accompanied by their mothers, talked more merrily ; the sound of violins was already heard. The cries of the boys playing, the sound of the balls hitting against one another, and the rattle of the porcelain lotteries, grew more and more distinct.

Rire smiled in delighted anticipation of the pleasure that awaited her.

‘ You will not go home till night, will you, godfather ? ’ said the girl, coaxingly.

The old farmer smiled.

‘ That will depend on the quality of the brandy that the good Ernault will have to give us, ’ muttered he.

Rire jumped for joy on the pony’s back.

‘ The amiable Ernault’s brandy is always good, ’ said she, ‘ and it pays no duty. ’

Her godfather smiled. He had sold many barrels of brandy to the publican without the exciseman touching a penny. At night, when it was quite dark, occasionally more than one horse might have been seen making its way along the deep road, and under the bundles of hay attached to both sides of the saddle might have been found those cans of brandy and of cider which were as



dear, and as fatal, to the Normans of a hundred years ago as to their descendants of the present day.

The evening had come. Rire had danced all day, and had drawn in the lotteries conducted by the best young men in the town. She had eaten cake and green plums, and dipped her lips in a little glass of brandy. But her enjoyment had not been unmixed ; for the daughters of the cattle-dealer wore finer lace in their bonnets than hers ; Pulchérie Lebourg, the niece of the great grazier of St. Marie, exhibited over her purple silk bodice a gold chain and cross, which glittered in Rire's dazzled eyes long after the young orphan was on her way to the distant farm where she kept house for her uncle.

Rire was tired, and not gay as she usually was ; and the smart repartee died on her lips. She began to think of her mother whom she had left so long alone, and a passionate desire to go home suddenly seized her. Rire always yielded to her first impulse, whether good or bad. This time a good impulse impelled her towards her mother ; the young girl was eager to go. She called Tranquille, who was hovering about her, though kept from



coming near by the presence of people richer and better dressed than himself.

‘ Will you go and see where my godfather is drinking, and if he is ready to have his pony saddled ? ’ she said to him.

When Tranquille returned, Rire had not gone back to dance ; she was sitting on a stone, leaning her head on her hand.

‘ The master says that the good man’s brandy is excellent, and that you may amuse yourself as long as you like. He is just now asleep, and will not waken very soon,’ said Tranquille.

The young serving-man did not say that he had tried to persuade the farmer to take Rire home, and that he had been rewarded by a volley of oaths.

Rire did not reply ; she had bent her head down, and her tears flowed between her fingers.

It was dark at that time, and Tranquille did not perceive that she was crying, till a little sob betrayed her grief.

‘ What is the matter ? ’ cried he, eagerly. ‘ Are you hurt ? Has anyone done you any harm ? ’



Rire shrugged her shoulders.

‘Leave me alone, Tranquille,’ said she, crossly. ‘As if one did not cry sometimes without knowing why. Tell my godfather I am going home on foot by the cross road, directly.’

Tranquille started.

‘Alone ! at night !’ said he. ‘That must not be ; I will go with you if you will allow me.’

‘That everybody may talk about it to-morrow !’ scornfully retorted the girl. ‘Are you afraid that I may meet the fairy bulls in the upper field ?’

Tranquille felt himself colour.

‘As I hope to go to Heaven there were more than a hundred in the corn, running about like so many demons,’ said he, twisting round his hand the leather thong of his stick. ‘If I had had this I could have chased them away, and the master ——’ Tranquille again coloured ; he had not forgiven the old farmer for the beating he had given him.

When he looked up again Rire was no longer sitting on the stone. She had disappeared, and was walking in the



dark, with her skirts tucked up and her umbrella in her hand, along the well-known road.

‘If my godfather is angry,’ thought she, ‘so much the worse for him; why did he not take me home on his pony?’

Rire advanced fearlessly; she only half believed the alarming stories she had been accustomed to hear ever since her childhood, and was not disturbed by fear of either goblin or fairy, or even of mysterious bulls. She did not listen to the night wind whistling in the branches of the trees, and paid no attention to the cries of the owls or the nibbling of the rabbits squatting in the hedges or scampering across the path. Once, however, she uttered a little scream when the moon, emerging from a cloud, showed her a black and yellow lizard gliding softly under the leaves of a trailing briar. The girl turned pale; but she quickly recovered herself when she remembered that the death foretold by a meeting with a lizard was only inevitable when the encounter took place between noon and midnight, and Rire had lingered so long at the fête that the old clock had struck twelve before she had started on her road home.



She was now drawing near the upper field, the boundary of her godfather's land. The long golden lines of the corn began to wave before her eyes, and she smiled at the idea of a troop of bulls turning into this rich crop. Suddenly she came in sight of the cluster of willows which stood out against the dark background of an old yew hedge, which was cut and trained carefully every year by the farmer's own hands, in memory of his grandfather, who was said to have planted it more than a hundred years before.

'Here I am at the Fort,' said Rire to herself, 'and once in the avenue it will be only a little quarter of an hour before I am at home. Let us hope Mademoiselle de Plunfort (a celebrated ghost of the neighbourhood) will not walk to-night.'

Just as she was thinking thus and quickening her steps to enter the long avenue of linden trees—the last remnant of those days in which the farm close by had been a seignorial manor—she distinctly heard the hard and regular sound of a washerwoman's beetle.

Rire turned pale, and for an instant her limbs trembled



under her ; then she advanced boldly, her eyes involuntarily fixed on the fort.

White figures appeared bending in the water, beetle now answered to beetle, and a woman of a large size moved up and down on the edge of the moat, as if directing her servants.

Rire walked with a convulsive step, and pressed her hands one against the other. 'It is Mademoiselle de Plunfort and the night washerwomen !' murmured she.

The beetles of the washers had stopped ; they had raised themselves up now, and were gliding noiselessly towards the young girl. The tallest woman, Mademoiselle de Plunfort, who had sacrificed everything to her love of pleasure—the peace of her mother, and the love of her betrothed—and therefore was condemned to be a wandering ghost, washing for ever the linen that she had neglected in life—appeared gliding along in spectral fashion, and looking just according to the stories current about her for so many years. She seized Rire's icy hand, and drew her into her funereal dance, while the other washerwomen formed a ring round them both: Rire, petrified by fear, could not take a single step, but



the phantom seemed to bear her along without any effort on her own part. She knew not where she was going—perhaps down, down into the bottomless pit—when all at once a friendly voice rang through the darkness.

‘Rire ! Rire !’ cried Tranquille. Then raising his stick in the direction of the shadows, he called aloud, in a strangely firm tone,

‘In the name of the Holy Trinity let my betrothed pass.’

The phantoms drew back, grew fainter, and then vanished in the darkness. Tranquille still advanced repeating the same words. Rire felt her hand loosed from the ghostly grasp. Through all her terror, and through the joy of her deliverance, she had been conscious of a new happiness at Tranquille’s bold words, ‘Let my betrothed pass.’ He had never yet asked her to marry him ; but he loved her, she knew ; she loved him also.

An hour later Rire went home to her mother, who wept with fear and joy at the wonderful story she told. The two young people had taken a long time to come up the lime avenue, but during that walk they had settled



the fate of their lives. Rire knelt at the foot of her mother's bed, and allowed Tranquille to explain everything. As he ended, he bent towards her and said in a low tone,

'If I had not followed you, Mademoiselle de Plunfort and her washerwoman would have made you dance while they were wringing their linen—dance until you were dead.'

Rire cast a happy and malicious look on her affianced. 'I did not see any linen,' she said, laughing.

'But you were not sorry to see me,' insisted Tranquille.

Rire threw herself into her mother's arms.

When, two months after, Tranquille took his bride to the village church, her godfather stopped her as they were coming from mass. 'I have sent a fine cow to your house; I owe you something for the fright you had that night of St. Loup's fête.'

Rire laughed. 'How fortunate the good man's brandy was so excellent. But for that I should perhaps not have known, even yet, that I loved Tranquille.'

'And how did you know that he loved you?' asked the old farmer.



Rire looked at her husband and smiled.

‘One always doubts of some things,’ answered she.

But the lovers kept to themselves the story of the night washerwomen.

The foolish young girl had become a sensible woman. She was as happy now to work as she had formerly been to go to fêtes.

Her mother did not recover her health, but she was no longer sad and lonely. She was rarely left alone now, except at the end of the day, when Tranquille returned from his work. Then he almost always found his wife waiting for him by the lime avenue.

‘Are you looking if the night washerwomen have left any of their linen behind?’ he would ask her, with tender maliciousness.

‘No,’ Rire would reply, with her old laugh. ‘I have looked for nothing since I found you.’



*THE BANSHEE OF WHITE-GOAT GLEN.*

GREAT many hundred years ago, when O'Donnell was building the first castle of Donegal, the workmen, do what they would, could not make any progress with their work. On each night, after they had gone away home, every stone that they had built up during the day was pulled down and flung back upon the ground. Of course the first time that this happened they were very angry, for they thought that some mischievous people had come and destroyed their work ; and so the next night they chose two of their number to keep watch, and gave them the strictest orders that at the first sound of any one coming near the place they should raise an alarm : but when the rest of the men came back in the morning they



found the two whom they had left rubbing their eyes, and all the stones that had been built up so carefully yesterday thrown down once more, and strewed about upon the ground.

As for the men themselves, they were quite bewildered and stupified, and could not tell anything that had happened. 'It must have been the fairies,' was all they could say, 'for sure we watched with all our might until we fell asleep, and we wouldn't have fallen asleep at all, but such a heaviness came upon our eyes that, do what we would, we couldn't keep them open; and it wasn't a natural sleep, but just something like a swoon.' And indeed they looked so confused and strange that, though a few of their fellow-workmen laughed at them, the greater number thought it no laughing matter, but shook their heads and went to their work unwillingly, saying below their breath that no good would come of fighting against the fairies.

However, they worked again all that day, and then once more when evening came they left two of their number to watch. The two who were left this time were big stout men, who were not afraid of anything,



either mortals or fairies, they said : so they armed themselves with a pair of stout cudgels, and said good bye to their companions, and sat down side by side to pass the night. But once more, when morning came and the other workmen returned, for the third time they found the walls pulled down and the stones scattered all round upon the ground, and the two big men in the midst of them lying so sound asleep that they had to kick and cuff and shake them before they could get them to open their eyes and sit up.

You may imagine how they looked when they did open their eyes at last. They sat staring round them like men who had lost their wits. 'We sat as wide awake as ever men were,' they said, as soon as they could speak, 'and not a sound did we hear as the hour passed, till the dawn began to creep up behind the hills ; and then, all at once, a weight like lead began to press upon our eyelids, and we got up to shake it off, and we know nothing more, but we must have fallen down in a dead sleep. It's fairies' work or devils' work,' they said, and rose upon their feet trembling and scared.

That day the overseer could hardly keep the men at



all at their labour. Some went away altogether, and the others moved about slowly and laid the stones with unwilling hands, speaking to one another, when they spoke at all, in whispers, and starting at each sound they heard. What was the good of going on building, they said to one another, when, as sure as night came, their work would be destroyed? And why, too, should they anger the fairies at the bidding of any mortal man? As the hours passed on they grew more and more surly, and the overseer began to feel that he had got a task to do which was too hard for him.

‘The master must see to it himself,’ he said at last; and so, before night returned, he went to O'Donnell and told him the strait that they were in.

‘It's more than flesh and blood that's fighting against us,’ he said.

‘I don't believe in much that isn't flesh and blood,’ replied O'Donnell, with a laugh. ‘Your men have been stupid heavy-headed fellows. I'll take the watch to-night, and I think it will be the worse for any fairy that meddles with me.’

When evening came, therefore, all the workmen went



home, many of them shaking their heads over the speech that they were told O'Donnell had made; and O'Donnell prepared to keep his watch.

It was a chill autumnal night, and the chieftain wrapped his cloak about him, and marched like a sentry round and round his walls. Hour passed after hour, and not a sound came to disturb him; the quiet little town soon went to sleep; the silence was broken by nothing but the sound of his own steps. Some time after midnight the moon rose, and made a pale cold light.

O'Donnell paced steadily to and fro; but he yawned portentously now and then, for he was getting very weary of his watch. 'It's high time that some one were coming—man or devil,' he said to himself at last, 'for this is dull work.' He gave another great yawn as he said these words, and then the very next moment his heart leapt almost to his lips; for in the act of yawning he had turned himself round, and there, standing close before him as he turned, he saw a strange white misty shape. It was standing full in his path—a shadowy pale figure, with a shrouded face.



O'Donnell was very brave, but for the moment he was taken aback. No sight of living man that might have met him, however suddenly, would have made the blood run quicker in his veins, but this thing was not human ; it was something mysterious and indistinct ; he almost thought, as he gazed at it, that he saw the moonlight shining through it, so little substance did it seem to have.

'Who are you, and what are you doing here?' he asked in a firm voice, after only two or three seconds had passed.

He spoke standing still, but with his hand stretched out to ward the thing off, for to his fancy it seemed to be coming closer to him.

There was a moment's silence after he put his question, and then a low voice answered him,

'What am *I* doing here? Rather, what are *you* doing here, O'Donnell?' it said. 'What right have you to come and take my sons' ground and build your castle on it?'

As soon as he heard this reply, O'Donnell burst out laughing



‘And who may your sons be? and how do they come to have a better right to the ground than I?’ he asked. ‘This ground is mine, and to him who desires it I give the lie to his teeth! If you are your sons’ messenger, go back to them and tell them that.’

‘Alas, O’Donnell, if I told them that I fear your life would be a short one,’ the voice sorrowfully replied.

It was such a sad plaintive voice that, hot with scorn as O’Donnell was becoming, it touched him and checked him in his anger, so that, instead of making a fierce answer, he answered almost gently.

‘My life will neither be the longer nor the shorter for your sons’ anger, I guess,’ he said.

The figure was standing only an arm’s length from him, and yet, near to him as it was, it was so shrouded and indistinct that he could neither discern its features nor trace its shape.

‘But I ask again, who are you? Are you spirit or woman?’ O’Donnell suddenly said; and, though the blood tingled in his veins, he made a quick step forward, and tried to grasp the shadowy dress. But the figure



only fell a little back, and his fingers closed on empty air.

‘I am one who has followed your family for generations, and who would be a friend to you : you need know nothing more,’ the voice said, after a moment’s silence. ‘Do what I bid you, and it will be well for you ; but reject my advice, and brave my sons, and not the destruction of your castle alone, but grief and misfortune will come upon you. I would save you from their wrath, O’Donnell. It is to warn and to save you that I have come.’

‘At least, then, good lady, tell me plainly the thing that you would have me do,’ replied O’Donnell bluntly.

He was a plain rough soldier, and the lady’s interest in him (if lady she were), while it moved him a little, puzzled him greatly too.

‘I know of no help or advice that I need from living man or woman either ; but yet if you, who seem to belong to some other place than earth, know aught concerning me that mortal cannot know—tell it to me, if it be your pleasure, and let me profit by it if I may. Though as for this ground belonging to your sons ——’



said O' Donnell, with his blood at the thought beginning to grow hot again.

'This ground has been my sons' for countless years,' the voice interrupted him gently. 'Before an O'Donnell was ever born they reigned here as kings. They are justly enraged with you because, without their permission, you are building your house upon this land, and they will throw down your work as long as you despise and defy them, though you should go on building for a hundred years. Therefore, O'Donnell, cease to defy them ;' and the sweet voice grew plaintive and earnest. 'Acknowledge their sovereignty, and they will cease to trouble you. You are a strong man, and you are lord over other men like yourself ; but my sons are kings of the earth, and the water, and the air.'

'I never heard of them,' said O'Donnell shortly. 'If they are mortal men ——'

'But they are *not* mortal men,' interrupted the voice.

Well, O'Donnell's mouth was closed at this, and he did not well know what more to say. He was so proud that, rather than have yielded an inch to any man born of woman, he would have perished on the spot ; but yield-



ing to men born of women was a very different matter—even to O'Donnell's thinking—stiff-necked as he was—from yielding to invisible and spiritual powers. The one was a thing never to be done while life was left; the other—well, the other was something to be considered, at any rate. So O'Donnell began to consider it, and, as well as he could in his rather agitating position, to revolve the question in his mind.

The figure of the white woman was standing still before him. He rubbed his eyes once to make sure that he had not fallen asleep, and that the whole thing was not a dream; but when he opened them again she was still there, shadowy and pale, but yet an unmistakable presence full before him, in his path. Who or what was she? Old tales that he had been familiar with as a child rose to his mind—ghostly old legends—weird stories that he had laughed at since he had grown to be a man. Yet, what if there were truth in them? What if there were truth in that about the Banshee of the Aileen-a-more-ban—the White-goat Island—the haunted island in the White-goat Glen? People said that the goats who wandered in that glen were not earthly



goats at all; but spirits—the three sons of the Banshee Doona Saan. ‘Old foolish tales!’ O’Donnell said to himself; and yet—what if the tales were true?

‘Lady,’ he said suddenly, ‘tell me who you are. Are you Doona Saan?’

‘Why do you ask me?’ she answered, after a moment’s silence.

‘Because,’ said O’Donnell boldly, ‘if you are Doona Saan you are a beautiful woman, and O’Donnell is not so unlike other men but that he will do more to please a fair face than a foul one. Show me your face, and if you are fair I will do your bidding.’

The figure gave a sigh, and for a few moments did not speak; and then something like shadowy arms began to move behind her veil.

‘I was fair enough once,’ she said sadly; ‘what I am now I do not know, but you may look at me if you will.’

She parted her veil, and turned it back; and the moon shone upon a face that was colourless as death, but yet beautiful as a dream—a shadowy, pale, motionless face, with dark sad eyes, that fixed themselves upon him, and made his heart beat fast.



He drew a deep breath, and before he spoke a minute or more had passed.

‘Yes, you are very fair,’ he said at last. ‘And now you have my promise ; therefore tell me what you would have me do.’

‘Come with me, then,’ she said to him, and beckoning him to follow her, she glided forward. She led him through the sleeping town (for it was night yet, and no one was astir) out to the silent country that was lying bathed in moonlight now, and on and on without a word, by the windings of the river Eske, until she brought him to the White-goat Glen.

It was a ghostly walk, and as he followed at the banshee's side, in spite of the exercise O'Donnell's blood ran somewhat cold. Was there treachery here? he thought to himself more than once. Did this woman only *seem* to be a phantom, and was she leading him on where some enemy lurked in wait for him? He walked wearily, looking to right and left of him, with his hand upon the dagger at his side.

But no one crossed them on their silent way, and when at length they reached the glen, the banshee paused.



‘Now I can lead you no further,’ she said. ‘You must go forward by yourself. Go boldly, and you will find my sons.’

‘But of what avail will that be to me, fair lady?’ said O'Donnell, whose temper this long pilgrimage had rather ruffled than improved. ‘By my life, though you brought me here, I have no business with your sons!’

‘O'Donnell,’ said the phantom, ‘you are a proud and stiff-necked man.’

She said this, and then she paused a little, and after that pause she stretched out her hand.

‘Go forward,’ she said again. ‘You have promised to do my bidding. For your own sake keep to your word.’

Well, O'Donnell could not deny that he had promised to do what she told him, so he gulped down his pride as well as he could, and leaving the banshee's side strode forward into the glen. It was a deep ravine with a stream flowing through it, and at one part where the stream parted lay the little island that bore the name of the Aileen-a-more-ban—a lonely uninhabited place. No human habitation had ever been built there; only the



wild goats haunted it—the three sons, as the legend said, of Doona Saan.

O'Donnell paced on into the darknesss, for little of the moon's light pierced into this deep hollow ; and, advancing slowly, for the way was rough, after a time he saw a white shape moving near him ; then two—then three white shapes. They were the wild goats, wandering to and fro, and grazing on the heather at their feet.

‘Well, if these are spirits and kings of the elements, they enjoy their sovereignty after a singular fashion !’ O'Donnell thought to himself ; and the blood came suddenly to his cheek with shame at his own credulity ; and he despised himself so for the errand he had come upon, that if it had not been for his promise to the banshee he would have turned upon his heel and retraced his steps.

But he had passed his word to her ; and, absurd as the whole business was, he said to himself that he would keep it ; so he took his stand, and cleared his throat, and lifted up his voice.

‘Spirits,’ he said, ‘if you *are* spirits, be pleased to understand that I ask permission from you to build my



house in the spot I have selected. If you have the power to grant me what I ask, grant it, and give me your friendship.'

He said these words, but no answer came to them ; nothing followed but a dead silence. As far as he could perceive in the gloom the white goats went on calmly grazing, taking no more notice of his speech than the most mundane of goats might do. 'What a fool I am !' O'Donnell thought angrily again to himself ; and now he was really on the point of turning back, when suddenly he saw that one of the goats had come close to him. With noiseless steps the weird white creature came, and passed before him, and as it passed it bent its head, and the soft hair touched his hand. Then, each following the other, the two other goats drew near, and did the same, and passed on silently out of sight.

'Strange !' said O'Donnell, with a kind of ghostly shiver ; and then, when he had waited for a few moments longer, and nothing more ensued, at last he did turn round and retraced his steps.

He thought that the banshee had vanished, but this was not so, for she met him again as soon as he regained



the point where she had parted from him, having apparently resolved not to depart until she had congratulated him on the accomplishment of his task.

‘You may build in safety now!’ she said to him at once, accosting him in quite a joyful tone.

‘Well, as for that, the safety of my building has yet to be learned,’ O’Donnell bluntly replied, not feeling by any means so pleased with the business he had just concluded as the lady seemed to be. ‘The safety of my building has yet to be learned; but at any rate I have done your bidding,’ he said.

‘Yes, and you will not regret that you have done it,’ she answered gently. ‘You will not regret it,’ she repeated, in a sterner voice; ‘though you do not believe what I tell you now that, because you have done it, happiness and prosperity will be yours.’

She looked at him as she said this, and O’Donnell at her looks felt confused; for indeed it was perfectly true that he did not believe that any special prosperity would come to him on account of this night’s work, and yet it seemed as if it would be ungracious to tell the banshee so to her face. So for a moment or two he was silent,



and looked confused; and then—for it suddenly appeared to him that the figure of the phantom was growing fainter, and his heart smote him that he should let her depart without one word of gratitude from him—all at once he put his hand out towards her, as if to arrest her vanishing, and—

‘Fair lady,’ he said, ‘if you are about to leave me, at least do not go before you take my thanks. It is true I hardly know as yet of what service you have been to me, but you have seemed to be my friend. If seeming has been truth, I offer you such gratitude as a man ought.’

‘And what is such gratitude worth?’ the phantom sadly replied. ‘You do not believe in my friendship, O’Donnell. You are a man, and you are hard to convince, and your gratitude is an unwilling gift—so take it back. I will wait for a day when you shall give it more freely—for a day when, perhaps, you may have learnt what you owe to Doona Saan.’

‘Nay, but fair lady,’ O’Donnell hurriedly began; but all at once, before he could say more, the banshee vanished. The figure suddenly became formless, like a



white cloud, and seemed to rise ; then almost in a moment more it had disappeared, as if it had melted into air, and O'Donnell was left alone, with his unspoken words upon his lips.

An hour after sunrise, when the workmen came back, they found the chieftain at his post, and their yesterday's work untouched ; not a stone of the wall had become displaced.

'Go on with your building now, and let me hear no more fools' stories,' O'Donnell said to them, sternly enough ; and then he went his way, and though many a whisper passed amongst them as to what had befallen him during those hours that he had kept watch, the real story of that night never became known to them.

But from that time forward the men worked undisturbed, and as days and weeks passed the castle walls rose higher and higher. 'He must have beaten the devil that night, or made a compact with him,' the workmen began to say to one another ; and as time went on, and not only in the building of his castle, but in all else that O'Donnell undertook, did he seem in a strange way to prosper, then they shook their heads and said with



more and more decision, 'He must have made a compact with some spirit to befriend him, for good fortune flows in upon him like the waters of a stream.'

But O'Donnell, you know, had made no compact with spirits either from above or below ; and if good fortune came fast upon him, it was to nothing that he himself had done that he was beholden for it. Yet he knew that from this time good fortune *did* come to him from every side, and often did he ponder in his mind whether in truth he owed his prosperity to the friendship of Doona Saan. He had not much desire to owe it to her, for he was a rough, blunt kind of man, who loved the common practical things of the world, and cared to do his daily work (and it was rude enough work often in those old fighting days), and cared for little else ; but yet, whether it was with his will, or whether it was against his will, his prosperity, and the protecting nature of the banshee's ghostly care of him, soon became two facts from which he could not escape. For after his first meeting with her he saw her often ; he saw her whether he would or not ; he could not be abroad after nightfall without feeling almost a certainty that somewhere or other she would



cross his path, and never did she cross it but she had some good advice to give him, some warning to offer him, some help to tender to him.

‘In truth, good lady, you take too great pains about my business,’ O’Donnell would occasionally say to her ; for he was a man of an impatient temper, and, kind though she was, her somewhat officious visitations had a tendency at times to irritate him. ‘You take too much trouble about my welfare. I am a rough man, and accustomed to push my own way in the world.’ But, though he would occasionally make some such ungracious speech as this to her, yet it produced but little effect upon her, so bent did she seem to be on serving him.

It became on the whole to O’Donnell, as time went on, a rather embarrassing state of things ; for, to tell the truth, in the bottom of his heart he did not like banshees, and would rather by a great deal have had dealings with men and with women like himself—people who had warm blood in their veins—than with phantoms, however kind or fair ; and yet he was driven into having constant dealings with this ghostly woman, and the gratitude that she forced him to feel obliged him in a sort to submit to these



perpetual dealings. In fact, he could not do otherwise than submit to them, for she showed herself to be his friend in a hundred ways, and gave better advice to him than he had ever been given in all his life before. He might, therefore, well be grateful to her. And yet he was a blunt, practical sort of man, and in spite of all his gratitude her constant visits came in time to weary him. He grew tired of seeing her, and of receiving nightly counsel from her. She was wiser than he was by a great deal, and he perceived that clearly ; she was powerful, and served him faithfully ; she was true, and he was grateful to her ; but yet—he was a strong-willed man, and he did not love to be meddled with, either by spirits or by flesh and blood.

‘Have you learnt yet to trust the banshee’s friendship?’ she would ask him sometimes, and with all honesty and earnestness he would answer her that he had. But still, behind this answer, when he made it, there was always something more within his mind that he could not say because he was ashamed—for he had learnt indeed to trust the banshee, but he had learnt to grow terribly weary of her too.



So time went on, until O'Donnell had been in his new house for about a year. It happened one evening at the year's end, as he was returning home, that, crossing a wood not far from the castle, he met an old man and his daughter, who stopped him, and prayed him to tell them where they were, for they were strangers and had lost their way.

'You are far here from any house but mine,' O'Donnell answered them, when they told this story to him. 'If you are strangers you are welcome to the shelter of my roof, and to-morrow you will tell me where you want to go, and I will set you on your way.'

So they went home with him very willingly. The next day, however, instead of continuing his journey, the old man professed himself to be so tired and footsore that any further travelling would greatly disagree with him.

'If I might rest here for a day or two longer,' he began to say to O'Donnell.

'Good sir,' O'Donnell interrupted him, 'rest here while you please. The house is large enough to accommodate a score of travellers. You and your daughter are welcome to all the shelter it can give.'



So upon this the old man said that he would stay thankfully ; and stay they did, not for a day or two only, but for week after week.

He was a very feeble old man, and seemed to have little strength for journeying. 'If it had not been for your goodness, noble sir,' his daughter said to O'Donnell, 'I think we should both have perished by the wayside.'

This daughter of the old man was a very beautiful young damsel, with dark bright eyes, and silken hair, and a figure as light and graceful as a young fawn. She was gay and merry, and she soon made herself wonderfully at home in O'Donnell's house. She was so clever that there seemed to be nothing that she could not do. She knew all about household matters, and could churn better butter and bake better bread than ever had been churned or baked in the castle before. She could embroider wonderful designs in tapestry, and tell stories over her work that forced you to listen to them whether you would or not, they were so strange and beautiful ; and then she could sing, so that they soon began to say about the house she could sing the heart out of men's breasts. And with all this she was so bright and cheery,



that she could make friends with everyone ; and if a cross word was said by anybody, she had a way of turning it into jest ; and if anyone were dull she seemed to know how to make him gay again ; and she had a pleasant face, and a soft voice, and a sweet enticing smile for everybody, man or woman, in the house. She had them for O'Donnell, just as she had for all the rest ; and if she sang most to him, and laughed and talked with him the most, that was scarcely to be laid to her charge, since he encouraged her to do it. He was her host, and she was only a poor maiden resting for a little while in his house. ' Surely if I can give you pleasure for a few moments by singing you my poor songs, I should be but too glad to sing them,' she would sometimes say to him, lifting her beautiful dark eyes up to his face.

' So you have strangers in your house?' Doona Saan said to O'Donnell, on the first night that she saw him after the pair had established themselves in the castle.

' Yes, there are strangers in the house,' O'Donnell replied ; and then he told her the manner in which he had met the old man and his daughter, and how he had brought them home. ' They will rest here for a day or



two,' he said, 'for the old man is very weakly, and hardly fit to betake himself again to the road.'

Upon this the banshee looked grave, and shook her head.

'See that he does not rest too long, O'Donnell,' she said, in a warning voice.

'Nay, he must rest while it suits him to do so,' O'Donnell quickly replied; and then he began to talk of something else, for there was something in the banshee's tone that he did not like, and he felt conscious that he himself was not in a humour to be meddled with.

On this occasion, therefore, nothing more was said between them about the old man and his daughter. But every time that the banshee saw O'Donnell she always met him with the same enquiry, 'Are the strangers with you yet?' until, after this question had been put to him half-a-dozen times or more, at last he lost patience, and made a sharp answer to her.

'Why do you go harping on in this way about the strangers? Is my very house not my own? Can I not so much as take a man and woman into it without your leave?'



Doona Saan made no answer, when he said this, for a few moments ; then she spoke in a sad low voice.

‘Alas ! O'Donnell, it would have been well for you and your house if you had never taken *this* man and woman into it. They will bring sore trouble on you if you do not let them go.’

‘I cannot turn two strangers from my door,’ he answered, angrily, ‘let their staying bring upon me what it may.’

He spoke hotly, and almost fiercely, and would not listen to any further warning from her ; and that day—because in this matter he would not endure her interference—he parted from her with sharp and bitter words ; and his wrath was so great against her for what she had said and for the advice that she had given him, that for days afterwards he never saw her again, but purposely avoided her, and gave himself up wholly to the delight of being with the stranger maiden, whose company had become by this time very sweet to the chieftain of the O'Donnells.

This went on for some time, until at last a day came



when he was hurriedly returning home after night had fallen. Since his last interview with Doona Saan he had purposely abstained from being out of his own castle after dark ; but this evening he had been detained late, and the sun had long set and the stars had come out over the tops of Mount Erigal and Muckish before he turned his horse's head home.

He was riding fast as he came near Donegal, for he felt a strong conviction that the banshee would be looking out for him, and would make an effort to stop him, and he said resolutely to himself that he would not be stopped ; so when he neared the castle he put spurs to his horse, and rode on rapidly. But, determined as he had been to ride straight home, his determination did not avail to carry him there ; for suddenly out of the darkness there stole a white cloudy thing, and stood in his horse's path. All at once the animal reared, and fell back almost on its haunches, trembling all over.

'Stand back, and let me get on !' cried O'Donnell, in a loud harsh voice.

But the banshee laid her hands upon the horse's bridle,



and the beast stood motionless, rooted to the earth like a rock.

‘You are just at your castle gate, and you have no such pressing need to reach home. Pause a moment while I speak to you. Have you taken my warning, or despised it? O'Donnell, have the strangers gone?’

‘No, they have *not* gone!’ he answered fiercely.

‘Alas! you do not know what you are doing!’ she cried, half sorrowfully, half angrily; ‘obstinate and blind, you are rushing on your ruin. Once more, before it is too late, I warn you, O'Donnell, if you keep that stranger woman beneath your roof, you lose me. The banshee will leave you, and protect you and your house no more.’

‘Little loss that,’ answered he, laughing scornfully, and struck his horse with his whip—but the animal only quivered, and did not move.

O'Donnell set himself firm in his saddle, and raised his whip.

‘Doona Saan, you have been my torment ever since I saw you. I and my household want your interference no more. Begone from my castle gate—begone, or I will drive you hence;’ and seeing the figure still in its place



at his horse's head, he struck at it once, twice—but the whip seemed to meet nothing save empty air.

The third time he struck, adding therewith a great oath, there was heard a loud shriek—the banshee's cry—familiar in the history of the O'Donnells for years and years—and the figure vanished. The chieftain stood in the midnight moonlight before his solitary castle door.

Next morning, a shepherd coming into the castle, declared that in the dim dawn he had seen a lady dressed in white, sitting, weeping and wringing her hands, on a rock in White-goat Glen ; and an hour after he had met the same lady going down the glen, still loudly lamenting, and driving before her three beautiful white goats. But when he spoke to her she never spoke to him ; and when she came to a bend in the road, whence the castle could be seen, she turned and looked back ; then, with a loud unearthly cry, she and her goats disappeared.

—Disappeared for ever ! Doona Saan and her three sons from that day were neither seen nor heard more.

O'Donnell married the stranger woman ; but she *was* a stranger ; and she did not understand either him or his kin - Irish kin, with the strong Irish feeling of blood and



the strong dislike to everything foreign and different from itself. Consequently there were troubles enough within the castle, whilst without misfortune after misfortune came, following one another like waves of the sea. They beat him down, year after year, and made a shipwrecked man of him, the fierce young chieftain, who had once been so brave and bold.

Sometimes he thought to himself, as he grew old, 'Doona Saan was right after all.' But he never mentioned her name.

On the night of his death some looked for the white figure floating outside the castle window, and listened for the banshee's cry, as had been customary whenever an O'Donnell died. But nothing was heard or seen. In life and in death Doona Saan had forsaken him.



*THE CASTLE IN THE LOUGH.**(A Legend of Donegal.)*

**F**ATHER,' little Dermot would say, 'tell me something more about the castle in the lough.'

Dermot M'Swyne was a little lad, with blue soft eyes and bright fair hair. He was the only son of Brian, the chief of the M'Swynes, and people used sometimes to say scornfully that he was a poor puny son to come of such a father, for he was not big and burly, as a M'Swyne ought to be, but slim and fair, and like a girl. However, Brian M'Swyne loved his fair-haired boy, and would have given up most other pleasures in the world for the pleasure of having the little fellow by his side and listening to his prattling voice. He was like his mother, those said who remembered the blue-eyed stranger whom



Brian M'Swyne had brought home ten years before as his wife to Doe Castle, in Donegal, and who had pined there for a few years and then died ; and perhaps it was for her sake that the child was so dear to the rough old chief. He was never tired of having the little lad beside him, and many a time he would carry him about and cradle him in his arms, and pass his big fingers through the boy's golden curls, and let the little hands play with his beard.

Sitting together in the firelight on winter nights, while the peat fire was burning on the floor, and the wind, sweeping across Lough Eske, went wailing round the castle walls and sighing in the leafless trees, the boy would often get his father to tell him stories of the country side. There were many strange legends treasured up in the memories of all old inhabitants of the place, wild stories of enchantments, or of fairies, or banshees ; and little Dermot would never tire of listening to these tales. Sometimes, when he had heard some only half-finished story, he would go dreaming on and on to himself about it, till he had woven an ending, or a dozen endings, to it in his own brain.



But of all the tales to which he used to listen there was one that perhaps, more than any other, he liked to hear—the story of the enchanted castle swallowed up by Lough Belshade. There, down beneath the waters of the dark lough, into which he had looked so often, was the castle standing still, its gates and towers and walls all perfect, just as it had stood upon the earth, the very fires still alight that had been burning on its hearths, and—more wonderful than all—the people who had been sunk in it, though fixed and motionless in their enchanted sleep, alive too. It was a wonder of wonders; the child was never tired of thinking of it, and dreaming of the time in which the enchantment should be broken, and of the person who should break it; for, strangest of all, the story said that they must sleep until a M'Swyne should come and wake them. But what M'Swyne would do it? And how was it to be done? 'Father,' little Dermot would say, 'tell me something more about the enchanted castle in the lough.'


The legend ran thus. On the shores of the desolate lough there had once stood a great castle, where lived a beautiful maiden called Eileen. Her father was the chief-



tain of a clan, and she was his only child. Many young lovers sought her, but she cared for none of them. At last there came to the castle a noble-looking knight. He had travelled from a far country, he said, and he began soon to tell wonderful stories to Eileen of the beauty and the richness of that land of his; how the skies there were always blue, and the sun always shone, and lords and ladies lived, not in rough stone-hewn castles like these, but in palaces all bright with marbles and precious stones; and how their lives were all a long delight, with music and dancing and all pleasant things.

Eileen listened while he told these tales to her, till she began to long to see his country; and her heart yearned for something brighter and better than the sombre life she led by the shores of the dark lough; and so when, after a time, the knight one day told her that he loved her, she gave him her promise to go to his home with him and marry him.

She was very contented for a little while after she had promised to be the knight's wife, and spent nearly all her time in talking to her lover, and in picturing to herself the new and beautiful things that she was going to see.





She was very happy on the whole ; though now and then, to tell the truth, as time went on, she began to be a little puzzled and surprised by certain things that the knight did, and certain odd habits that he had ; for, in fact, he had some very odd habits indeed ; and, charming and handsome as he was, conducted himself occasionally in really quite a singular way.

For instance, it was a curious fact that he never could bear the sight of a dog, and if ever one came near him (and as there were a good many dogs about the castle it was quite impossible to keep them from coming near him now and then) he would set his teeth, and rise slowly from his seat and begin to make a low hissing noise, craning his neck forward, and swelling and rounding his back in such an extraordinary way that the first time Eileen saw him doing it she thought he was going to have a fit, and was quite alarmed.

‘Oh dear, I—I’m afraid you’re ill?’ she exclaimed, getting upon her feet and feeling very uneasy.

‘No, no, its only—its only—the dog,’ gasped the knight, gripping his seat with both hands, as if it needed the greatest effort to keep himself still. ‘Hiss—s—s—s!’



I've such a terrible dislike to dogs. It's—it's in my family,' said the poor young man; and he could not recover his composure at all till the little animal that had disturbed him was carried away.

Then he had such a strange fashion of amusing himself in his own room where he slept. It was a spacious room, hung all round with arras; and often, after all the household had gone to bed, those who slept nearest to the knight were awakened out of their sleep by the noise he made in running up and down, and here and there; scudding about over the floor, and even—as far as could be guessed by the sounds—clambering up the walls, just as though, instead of being a gracious high-bred young gentleman, he had been the veriest tom-boy.

'I fear, sir knight, you do not always rest easily in your apartment,' Eileen's old father said to him one morning after he had been making even more disturbance of this sort than usual. 'We have rough ways here in the north, and perhaps the arrangement of your sleeping quarters is not exactly to your liking?'

But the knight, when he began to say this, interrupted him hastily, and declared that he had never slept more.



comfortably in any room in his life, or more peacefully, he said ; he was seldom conscious of even so much as awakening once. Of course when he said this Eileen and her father could only open their eyes, and come to the conclusion that the poor young knight was a somnambulist, and afflicted with the habit of running and leaping in his sleep.

Again, too, out-of-doors, it was very odd how it affected him to hear the birds sing. Whenever they began their songs all sorts of nervous twitchings would come over him, and he would lick his lips, and make convulsive movements with his hands ; and his attention would become so distracted that he would quite lose the thread of his discourse if he were talking, or the thread of Eileen's, if she were talking to him. ' It is because I enjoy hearing them so much,' he said once ; and of course when he said so Eileen could only believe him ; yet she could not help wishing he would show his pleasure in some other way than this curious one of setting his teeth and rolling his eyes, and looking much more as if he wanted to eat the birds than to listen to them.

Still, in spite of these and a good many other pe-



culiarities, the young knight was very charming and Eileen was very fond of him. They used to spend the happiest days together, wandering about the wild and beautiful country, often sitting for hours on the rocky shores of the dark lough, looking into the deep still water at their feet. It was a wild, romantic, lonely place, shut out from the sunlight by great granite cliffs, that threw their dark weird shadows over it.

‘Do you know there is a prophecy that our castle shall stand one day here in the middle of the lough?’ Eileen said, laughing, once. ‘I don’t know how it is to be done, but we are to be planted somehow in the middle of the water. That is what the people say. I shouldn’t like to live here then. How gloomy it would be to have those great shadows always over us!’ and the girl shivered a little, and stole her hand into her lover’s, and they began to talk about the far different place where she should live; his beautiful palace, far away in the sunny country beyond the sea. She was never weary of hearing about the new place and new life that she was going to, and all the beauty and happiness that were going to be hers.



So time went on, until at last the day before the marriage-day came. Eileen had been showing her lover all her ornaments; she had a great number of very precious ones, and to please him and amuse herself she had been putting them all on, loading herself with armlets and bracelets and heavy chains of gold, such as the old Irish princesses used to wear, till she looked as gorgeous as a princess herself.

It was a sunny summer day, and she sat thinking to herself, 'My married life will begin so soon now—the new, beautiful, strange life—and I will wear these ornaments in the midst of it; but, where everything else is so lovely, will *he* think me then as lovely as he does now?'

Presently, she glanced up—with a little shyness and a little vanity, just to see if he was looking at and thinking of her; but as she lifted up her head, instead of finding that his eyes were resting on her, she found—

Well, she found that the knight was certainly not thinking of her one bit. He was sitting staring fixedly at one corner of the apartment, with his lips working in the oddest fashion; twitching this way and that, and



parting and showing his teeth, while he was clawing with his hands the chair on which he sat.

‘Dear me,’ said Eileen rather sharply and pettishly, ‘what is the matter with you?’

Eileen spoke pretty crossly; for, as she had on various previous occasions seen the knight conduct himself in this sort of way, her feeling was less of alarm at the sight of him than simply of annoyance that at this moment, when she herself had been thinking of him so tenderly, he could be giving his attention to any other thing. ‘What *is* the matter with you?’ she said, and she raised herself in her chair and turned round her head to see if *she* could perceive anything worth looking at in that corner into which the knight was staring almost as if the eyes would leap out of his head.

‘Why, there’s nothing there but a mouse!’ she said contemptuously, when she had looked and listened for a moment, and heard only a little faint scratching behind the tapestry.

‘No, no, I believe not; oh no, nothing but a mouse,’ replied the knight hurriedly; but still he did not take his eyes from the spot, and he moved from side to side



in his chair, and twitched his head from right to left, and looked altogether as if he hardly knew what he was about.

‘And I am sure a mouse is a most harmless thing,’ said Eileen.

‘Harmless? Oh! delicious!’ replied the knight, with so much unction that Eileen, in *her* turn, opened her eyes and stared. ‘Delicious! quite delicious!’ murmured the knight again

But after a moment or two more, all at once he seemed to recollect himself, and made a great effort, and withdrew his eyes from the corner where the mouse was still making a little feeble scratching, and—

‘I mean, a—a most interesting animal,’ he said. ‘I have always felt with regard to mice——’

But just at this instant the mouse poked out his little head from beneath the tapestry, and the knight leapt to his feet as if he was shot.

‘Hiss—s—s! skier—r—r! hiss—s—s—s!’ he cried; and—could Eileen believe her eyes?—for one instant she saw the knight flash past her, and then there was nothing living in the room beside her but a great black



cat, clinging by his claws half way up the arras, and a little brown mouse between his teeth.

Of course the only thing that Eileen could do was to faint ; and so she fainted, and it was six hours before she came to herself again. In the meantime nobody in the world knew what had happened ; and when she opened her eyes and began to cry out about a terrible black cat, they all thought she had gone out of her mind.

‘ My dear child, I assure you there is no such thing in the house as a black cat,’ her father said uneasily to her, trying to soothe her in the best way he could. .

‘ Oh yes, he turned into a black cat,’ cried Eileen.

‘ *Who* turned into a black cat?’ cried her father.

‘ The knight did,’ sobbed Eileen.

And then the poor old father went out of the room, thinking that his daughter was going mad.

‘ She is quite beside herself ; she says that you are not a man, but a cat,’ he said sorrowfully to the young knight, whom he met standing outside his daughter’s room. ‘ What in the world could have put such thoughts



into her head ! Not a thing will she talk about but black cats.'

'Let me see her ; I will bring her to her right mind,' said the knight.

'I doubt it very much,' replied the chief ; but as he did not know what else to do, he let him go into the room, and the knight went in softly, and closed the door, and went up to the couch on which Eileen lay. She lay with her eyes closed, and with all her gold chains still upon her neck and arms ; and the knight, because he trod softly, had come quite up to her side, before she knew that he was there. But the moment she opened her eyes and saw him, she gave such a scream that it quite made him leap ; and if he had not bolted the door every creature in the castle would have rushed into the room at the sound of it. Fortunately for him, however, he *had* bolted the door, and as it was a very stout door, made of strong oak, Eileen might have screamed for an hour before any body could have burst it open. As soon, therefore, as the knight had recovered from the start she gave him, he quietly took a chair, and sat down by her side.



‘Eileen,’ he said, beginning to speak at once—for probably he felt that the matter he had come to mention was rather a painful and a delicate one, and the more quickly he could get over what he had to say the better—‘Eileen, you have unhappily to-day seen me under—ahem!—under an unaccustomed shape——’

He had only got so far as this when Eileen gave another shriek, and covered her face with her hands.

‘I say,’ repeated the knight, in a tone of some annoyance, and raising his voice, for Eileen was making such a noise that it was really necessary to speak pretty loudly; ‘I say you have unfortunately seen me to-day under a shape that you were not prepared for, but I have come, my love, to assure you that the—the transformation—was purely accidental—a mere blunder of a moment—an occurrence that shall never be repeated in your sight. Look up to me again, Eileen, and do not let this eve of our marriage-day——’

But what the knight had got to say about the eve of their marriage day Eileen never heard, for as soon as he had reached these words she gave another shriek so loud that he jumped upon his seat.



‘Do you think that I will ever marry a black cat?’ cried Eileen, fixing her eyes with a look of horror on his face.

‘Eileen, take care!’ exclaimed the knight sternly. ‘Take care how you anger me, or it will be the worse for you.’

‘The worse for me! Do you think I am afraid of you?’ said Eileen with her eyes all flashing; for she had a high enough spirit, and was not going to allow herself to be forced to marry a black cat, let the knight say what he would. She rose from her couch, and would have sprung to the ground, if all at once the knight had not bent forward, and taken her by her hand.

‘Eileen,’ said the knight, holding her fast, and looking into her face, ‘Eileen, will you be my wife?’

‘I would sooner die!’ cried Eileen.

‘Eileen,’ cried the knight passionately, ‘I love you! Do not break your promise to me. Forget what you have seen. I am a powerful magician. I will make you happy. I will give you all you want. Be my wife.’

‘Never!’ cried Eileen.

‘Then you have sealed your fate!’ exclaimed the



knight fiercely ; and suddenly he rose and extended his arms, and said some strange words that Eileen did not understand ; and all at once it appeared to her as if some thick white pall were spreading over her, and her eyelids began to close, and involuntarily she sank back.

Once more, but as if in a dream, she heard the knight's voice.

‘ If you do not become my wife,’ he said, ‘ you shall never be the wife of any living man. The black cat can hold his own. Sleep here till another lover comes to woo you.’

A mocking laugh rang through the room—and then Eileen heard no more. It seemed to her that her life was passing away. A strange feeling came to her, as if she were sinking through the air ; there was a sound in her ears of rushing water ; and then all recollection and all consciousness ceased.

Some travellers, passing that evening by the lough, gazed at the spot on which the castle had stood, and rubbed their eyes in wild surprise, for there was no castle there, but only a bare tract of desolate waste



ground. The prophecy had been fulfilled; the castle had been lifted up from its foundations and sunk in the waters of the lough.

This was the story that Dermot used to listen to as he sat in his father's hall on winter nights—a wild old story, very strange, and sweet, too, as well as strange. For they were living still, the legend always said—the chief and his household, and beautiful Eileen; not dead at all, but only sleeping an enchanted sleep, till some one of the M'Swynes should come and kill the black cat who guarded them, and set them free. Under those dark deep waters, asleep for three hundred years, lay Eileen, with all her massive ornaments on her neck and arms, and in her red-gold Irish hair. How often did the boy think of her, and picture to himself the motionless face with its closed waiting eyes, and yearn to see it. Asleep there for three hundred years! His heart used to burn at the imagination. In all these centuries had no M'Swyne been found bold enough to find the black cat and kill him? Could it be so hard a thing to kill a black cat? the little fellow thought.



‘I’d kill him myself if only I had the chance,’ he said one day ; and when he said that, his father laughed.

‘Ay, my lad, you might kill him if you had the chance—but how would you *get* the chance? Do you think the great magician would be fool enough to leave his watch over the lough, and put himself in your way? Kill him? Yes, we could any of us kill him if we could catch him ; but three hundred years have passed away, and nobody has ever caught him yet.’

‘Well, I may do it some day, when I am grown a man,’ Dermot said.

So he went on dreaming over the old legend, and weaving out of his own brain an ending to it. What if it should be indeed his lot to awake Eileen from her enchanted sleep? He used to wander often by the shores of the dark little lough, and gaze into the shadowy waters. Many a time, too, he would sail across them, leaning down over his boat’s side, to try in vain to catch some glimpse of the buried castle’s walls or towers. Once or twice—it might have been mere fancy—but it seemed to him as if he saw some dark thing below the surface, and he would cry aloud—‘The cat !



I see the black cat !' But they only laughed at him when he returned home, and said this. 'It was only a big fish at the bottom of the water, my boy,' his father would reply.

When he was a boy he talked of this story often, and was never weary of asking questions concerning it ; but presently, as he grew older, he grew more reserved and shy, and when he spoke about Eileen the colour used to come into his cheek. 'Why, boy, are you falling in love with her?' his father said to him one day. 'Are there not unbewitched maidens enough to please you on the face of the earth, but you must take a fancy to a bewitched one, lying asleep at the bottom of the lough?' and he laughed aloud at him. After that day Dermot never spoke of Eileen in his father's hearing. But, although he ceased to speak of her, yet only the more did he think and dream about her, and the older he grew the less did he seem to care for any of those unbewitched maidens of whom his father had talked, and the only maiden of whom he thought with love and longing was this one who lay asleep in the enchanted castle in the lough.



So the years passed on, and in time Dermot's father died, and the young man became chieftain of his clan. He was straight and tall, with blue clear eyes, and a frank fair face. Some of the M'Swynes, who were a rough burly race, looked scornfully on him, and said that he was fitter to make love to ladies than to head men in a battle-field ; but they wronged him when they said that, for no braver soldier than Dermot had ever led their clan. He was both brave and gentle too, and courteous, and tender, and kind ; and as for being only fit to make love to ladies—why, making love to ladies was almost the only thing he never did.

‘Are you not going to bring home a wife to the old house, my son?’ said his foster-mother, an old woman who had lived with him all her life. ‘Before I die I’d love to dandle a child of yours upon my knee.’

But Dermot only shook his head. ‘My wife, I fear, will be hard to win. I may have to wait for her all my days.’ And then, after a little while, when the old woman still went on talking to him, ‘How can I marry when my love has been asleep these three hundred years?’

This was the first time that he had spoken about



Eileen for many a day, and the old nurse had thought, like everybody else, that he had forgotten that old legend and all the foolish fancies of his youth.

She was sitting at her spinning-wheel, but she dropped the thread, and folded her hands sadly on her knees.

‘My son, why think on her that’s as good as dead? Even if you could win her, would you take a bewitched maiden to be your wife?’

It was a summer’s day, and Dermot stood looking far away through the sunshine towards where, though he could not see it, the enchanted castle lay. He had stood in that same place a thousand times, looking towards it, dreaming over the old tale.

For several minutes he made no answer to what the old woman had said; then all at once he turned round to her.

‘Nurse,’ he said, passionately, ‘I have adored her for twenty years! Ever since I first stood at your knees, and you told me of her, she has been the one love of my heart. Unless I can marry her I will never marry any woman in this world.’ He came to the old woman’s side, and, though he was a full grown man, he put his arms



about her neck. 'Nurse, you have a keen woman's wit; cannot you help me with it?' he said. 'I have wandered round the lough by day and night, and challenged the magician to come and try his power against me, but he does not hear me, or he will not come. How can I reach him through those dark cruel waters, and force him to come out of them and fight with me?'

'Foolish lad,' the old woman said. She was a wise old woman, but she believed as much as everybody else did in the legend of the castle in the lough. 'What has *he* to gain that he need come up and fight with you?' 'Do you think the black cat's such a fool as to heed your ranting and your challenging?'

'But what else can I do?'

The old woman took her thread into her hands again, and sat spinning for two or three minutes without answering a word. She was a sensible old woman, and it seemed to her a sad pity that a fine young man like her foster-son should waste his life in pining for the love of a maiden who had lain asleep and enchanted for three hundred years! Yet the nurse loved him so dearly that she could not bear to cross him in anything, or to refuse



to do anything that he asked. So she sat spinning and thinking for a little while, and then said—

‘It was a mouse that made him show himself in his own shape first, and it’s few mice he can be catching, I guess, down in the bottom of the lough. I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you half-a-dozen mice in a bag to-morrow, and you can let them loose when you get to the water-side, and see if that will bring him up.’

Well, Dermot did not think very much of this plan; but still, as he had asked the old woman to help him, he felt that he could not avoid taking her advice; and so the next morning his nurse gave him a bag with half-a-dozen mice in it, and he carried it with him to the lough. But, alas! as soon as ever he had opened the bag, all the six mice rushed away like lightning, and were out of sight in a moment.

‘That chance is soon ended,’ Dermot said mournfully to himself; so he took back the empty bag to his nurse, and told her what had happened.

‘You goose, why didn’t you let them out one by one?’ enquired she. ‘Sure they would run when you opened the bag. You should have made play with them.’



‘To be sure, so I should ; but I never thought of that. I’ll do better next time.’

So next day the woman brought him the bag again, filled this time with fat rats, and he took it to the lough, and laid it down at the waterside, and opened the mouth of it just wide enough for one of the rats to put out his nose ; and then he sat and watched, and watched, letting the rats run away one by one ; but though he sat watching for the whole day, not a sign did he ever see of the black cat. At last he came disconsolately home again, with the empty bag on his shoulder.

‘Never mind, my son, we’ll try something else to-morrow,’ said nurse, cheerfully. So next morning she brought him a fishing-rod, and a large piece of toasted cheese. ‘Take this to the lough and bait your hook with it,’ she said, ‘and see if the black cat won’t come up and take a bite. All cats like cheese.’

Dermot went immediately to the lough, baited his hook, and threw the line out into the water. After a few minutes his heart gave a great jump, for he felt a sudden pull at the line. He drew it in softly and cautiously ; but when he got it to the water’s edge there



was nothing on his hook but a large flat fish—and the toasted cheese had all broken away and was gone.

‘What a foolish old woman to give me toasted cheese to put into water,’ he said to himself; then he heaved a sigh, threw the fish into his bag, and once more went sadly away.

‘I daresay the villain of a cat has breakfasted nicely off the toasted cheese without the trouble of coming for it,’ he said bitterly, when he got home.

‘Never mind; we’ll may be have better luck to-morrow,’ replied the nurse. ‘I dreamt a dream, and in the dream I thought of something else to do.’

So, early next morning, she brought a fat black pig.

‘What in the world am I to do with this?’ said Dermot, sharply.

‘Ah, now, be easy, my dear,’ said the old woman coaxingly. ‘Just take it down to the lough, and roast it there, and sure when the cat smells the fine smell of it he’ll come up for a taste.’

Now Dermot was getting rather tired of doing all these odd things; and though he had readily gone to the lough with the mice and the rats and the toasted



cheese, yet he did not at all relish the notion of carrying a live pig across the country with him for two or three miles. However, he was very good-natured, and so, although he did not himself think that any good would come of it, after a little while he let his nurse persuade him to take the pig. The old woman tied a string about its leg, and he took it to the lough, and as soon as he got there he collected some sticks and peat together, and, building up a good big fire, set light to it. Then he killed the pig with his hunting-knife, and hung it up before the fire to roast. Presently a most savoury smell began to fill the air.

Dermot withdrew a little way, sat down behind a jutting piece of rock, and watched, his eyes never leaving the smooth surface of the lough ; but minute after minute passed, and not the slightest movement stirred it. From time to time he made up his fire afresh, and turned his pig from side to side. The whole air around grew full of the smell of roasting meat, so savoury that, being hungry, it made Dermot's own mouth water ; but still—there lay the lough, quiet and smooth and undisturbed



as glass, with only the dark shadows of the silent rocks lying across it.

At last the pig was cooked and ready, and Dermot rose and drew it from the fire.

‘I may as well make my own dinner off it,’ he thought sorrowfully to himself, ‘for nobody else will come to have a share of it.’ So he took his knife and cut himself a juicy slice, and sat down again, concealing himself behind the rock, with his bow and arrow by his side, and had just lifted the first morsel to his lips, when—

Down fell the untasted meat upon the ground, and his heart leapt to his lips, for surely something at last was stirring the water! The oily surface had broken into circles; there was a movement, a little splash, a sudden vision of something black. A moment or two he sat breathlessly gazing: and then—was he asleep, or was he waking and really saw it?—he saw above the water a black cat’s head. Black head, black paws put out to swim, black back, black tail.

Dermot took his bow up in his hand, and tried to fit an arrow to it; but his hand shook, and for a few moments



he could not draw. Slowly the creature swam to the water's edge, and, reaching it, planted its feet upon the earth, and looked warily, with green watchful eye, all round ; then, shaking itself—and the water seemed to glide off its black fur as off a duck's back—it licked its lips, and, giving one great sweep into the air, it bounded forward to where the roasted pig was smoking on the ground. For a moment Dermot saw it, with its tail high in the air, and its tongue stretched out to lick the crackling ; and then, sharp and sure, whizz ! went an arrow from his bow ; and the next moment, stretched flat upon the ground, after one great dismal howl, lay the man-cat, or cat-man, with an arrow in his heart.

Dermot sprang to his feet, and rushing to the creature's side caught him by the throat ; but he was dead already : only the great, wide-opened, green, fierce eyes, seemed to shoot out an almost human look of hatred and despair, before they closed for ever. The young chieftain took up the beast, looked at it, and with all his might flung it from him into the lough ; then turning round, he stretched his arms out passionately.

‘ Eileen ! Eileen ! ’ he cried aloud ; and as though that



word had broken the spell, all at once—oh, wonderful sight!—the enchanted castle began to rise. Higher it rose, and higher; one little turret first; then pinnacles and tower and roof; then strong stone walls; until, complete, it stood upon the surface of the lough, like a strange floating ship. And then, slowly and gently, it drifted to the shore, and, rising at the water's edge, glided a little through the air, and sank at last upon the earth, fixing itself firmly down once more where it had stood of old, as if its foundations never had been stirred through the whole of those three hundred years.

With his heart beating fast, Dermot stood gazing as if he could never cease to gaze. It was a lovely summer day, and all the landscape round him was bathed in sunlight. The radiance shone all over the grey castle walls, and made each leaf on every tree a golden glory; it shone on bright flowers blooming in the castle garden; it shone on human figures that began to live and move. Breathless and motionless Dermot watched them. He was not close to them, but near enough to see them in their strange quaint dresses, passing to and



fro, like figures that had started from some painted picture of a bygone age. The place grew full of them. They poured out from the castle gates; they gathered into groups; they spread themselves abroad; they streamed out from the castle, right and left. Did they know that they had been asleep? Apparently not, for each man went on with his natural occupation, as if he had but paused over it a moment to take breath. A hum of voices filled the air; Dermot heard strange accents almost like those of an unknown tongue, mingled with the sound of laughter. Three hundred years had passed away, and yet they did not seem to know it; busily they went about their sports or labours—as calmly and unconsciously as if they never had been interrupted for an hour.

And, in the midst of all, where was Eileen? The young chieftain stood looking at the strange scene before him, with his heart beating high and fast. He had killed the cat; he had broken the enchantment; he had awakened the castle from its sleep; but what was to come next? Did the prophecy, which said that a



M'Swyne should do this, say also that, for doing it, he should be given a reward ?

Nay, it said nothing more. The rest was all a blank. But was there, then, to be no reward for him ? Dermot stood suddenly erect, and crushed down a certain faintness that had been rising in his heart. The prophecy, indeed, said nothing ; but he would carve out the rest of his destiny for himself.

And so he carved it out. He went straight through the unknown people to the castle garden, and found—was it what he sought ? He found a lady gathering flowers—a lady in a rich dress, with golden armlets, bracelets, and head-ornaments—such as are now only discovered in tombs. But she was not dead ; she was alive, and young. For she turned round, and after his life's patient waiting, Dermot saw Eileen's face.

And then—what more ? Well, need I tell the rest ? What ending could the story have but one ? Of course he made her love him, and they married, and lived, and died. That was the whole. They were probably happy



—I do not know. You may see the little lough still in that wild country of Donegal, and the deep dark waters that hid the enchanted castle beneath them for so many years. As for the castle itself—that, I think, has crumbled away ; and the whole story is only a story legend—one of the pretty, foolish legends of the old times.



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